

FROM PRECEPTS TO PEOPLE:

A STUDY OF CHARACTERISATION IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT

by

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Abstract:

George Eliot is undoubtedly one of our most intellectual authors. A study of her methods of characterisation, of the kinds of choices her characters confront, and of the solutions offered for the various moral dilemmas discussed in the novels, reveals the basic moral and psychological assumptions she shared with her contemporaries.

Thus, the tensions generated by her attempt to reconcile a belief in universal causality with a belief in the possibility of exercising the will and therefore of being morally responsible require her to emphasise the inexorability of the laws of antecedent and consequent and at the same time to retain for her characters a slight measure of freedom of choice.

As nineteenth century psychology gradually freed itself of its philosophical origins, it incorporated elements from biology, neurophysiology, and sociology. George Eliot's knowledge of association psychology is revealed by her use of the theory of psychological determinism which governs the way in which her characters exhibit moral ascendancy or decline. Similarly, her emphasis on the "medium" in which a character lives relates to the mid-nineteenth century biological and sociological stress on environment and the interdependence of an organism with its medium. Lastly, the emergent evolutionary psychology which held that ancestral tendencies, once established in the nervous system, were transmittable from generation to generation, becomes a factor in two of her later works.

George Eliot's concern for the moral development of her readers and the enlargement of their sympathies is well documented in her

letters. Because she believes in the possibilities of individual moral growth, the novels are concerned with moral development and decline. Characters can be placed along a moral axis according as they display or reject such qualities as sympathy, or allegiance to the past, or acceptance of duty. Unmistakably throughout all George Eliot's moral conflicts and solutions is a hierarchy of absolute values.

To bridge the gap between description and evaluation, however, it is necessary to examine more specifically the aesthetic implications of George Eliot's framework of belief. Her concept of self, the tragic implications of a framework of universal causality and irreversible laws, constitute important limitations on the manipulation of plot and theme, and on the development of characters and the choices they confront.

Preface.

There are only three footnotes in this work. These are designated by Roman numerals to distinguish them from the notes which are located at the end of the text.

I should like to thank Dr Gordon Spence for his patient reading of my work and his helpful comments, and Professor K. K. Ruthven for his advice and encouragement.

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Introduction.

"Lesson on the Brain to Polly." ¹ Lewes' endearing journal entry for 14 April, 1870 affirms our belief that George Eliot is one of our most intellectual authors. Her familiarity with European literature, her competent editing of the Westminster Review, her friendship with so many eminent nineteenth-century scientists, philosophers, and sociologists, all testify to her intellectual appetite and to the extent of her knowledge of contemporary developments. An examination of the surface texture of her novels reveals a vast array of literary and scientific allusion, sometimes in the form of metaphor and sometimes in a more generalised authorial comment. These overt references are not the only evidence, however, of George Eliot's system of beliefs. A study of her methods of characterisation, of the sorts of choices she allows her characters to confront, and of the solutions she offers for the various moral dilemmas discussed in the novels, reveals the basic moral and psychological assumptions she shared with her contemporaries.

Thus, the tensions generated by her attempt to reconcile a belief in "universal causality" ² with a belief in the possibility of exercising the will and therefore of being morally responsible for one's actions, require her to emphasise the inexorability of the laws of antecedent and consequent and at the same time to retain for her characters a slight measure of freedom of choice.

As nineteenth century psychology gradually freed itself of its philosophical origins, it incorporated elements from biology, neurophysiology, and sociology. In this way it became an experimental science in its own right. Early nineteenth century psychology was laid on the foundation of Locke's chapter on the association of ideas. Habitual responses were

thought to result from the frequency or vividness with which ideas or impressions were presented to the mind. George Eliot makes use of this association psychology when she incorporates the theory of psychological determinism into her novels. This theory governs her conception of the way in which a character exhibits moral ascendancy or moral decline. Similarly, her emphasis on the "medium" in which a character lives is akin to the mid-nineteenth century biological and sociological stress on environment and the interdependence of an organism with its medium. Lastly, the emergent evolutionary psychology which held that ancestral tendencies, once established in the nervous system, were transmittable from one generation to the next becomes a factor in two of her later works, The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda.

George Eliot's concern for the moral development of her readers and the enlargement of their sympathies is well documented in her letters.

Nineteenth century agnostics, deprived of the moral sanctions of Christianity, had to seek elsewhere for a foundation for their ethical beliefs. Interpretations of The Origin of Species tended to be progressivist and teleological, especially when the conclusions derived from Darwin's biological hypothesis were applied to the field of anthropology. George Eliot is less of a facile optimist than some of her contemporaries, but she still preserves a belief in the possibilities of individual moral growth. The novels are concerned with moral development and moral decline and the various ways in which these are achieved. Characters in the novels can be placed along a moral axis according as they display or reject such moral qualities as sympathy, or allegiance to the past, or acceptance of duty. Unmistakably throughout all George Eliot's moral conflicts and solutions is a hierarchy of absolute values.

The intellectual breadth that is thus manifest in George Eliot's novels leads Basil Willey to declare that "probably no English writer of

the time, and certainly no novelist, more fully epitomizes the century; her development is a paradigm, her intellectual biography a graph, of its most decided trend." ³ One possible approach, therefore, to George Eliot's work is to use her articles, letters, and novels as quarries for research into nineteenth century ideologies. A related pursuit is the search for influences, and the detection of similarities between her thought and that of her contemporaries, not in order to suggest a common preoccupation with certain topics but in order to establish causal links. Historians of ideas can delve into her novels and come up with items labelled "Comte," or "Feuerbach," or "Darwin." But conclusions of this kind are very difficult to prove and therefore always remain tentative. And when we are dealing with a mind of the quality of George Eliot's, it is highly probable that on certain occasions she herself was the originator of the "influence." Lewes, for example, acknowledges that he owes to her his recognition of the Utopian nature of Comte's work. ⁴ Later, in The Study of Psychology (1878), he mentions that "one very near and dear" ⁵ has brought to his notice an important passage from Aristotle's Ethics. Herbert Spencer similarly admits a debt to her. ⁶ In his Autobiography, he also states clearly that "there is not the slightest foundation" for the belief that he had much to do with her education: their "friendship did not commence until 1851--a date several years later than the publication of her translation of Strauss, and when she was already distinguished by that breadth of culture and universality of power which have since made her known to all the world." ⁷ And a further indication of the pervasiveness of her influence occurs in the notes Darwin's son added to the posthumous edition of The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals. ⁸ For there he suggests that readers who are seeking confirmation of his father's thesis should turn to George Eliot's novels. Clearly George Eliot exerted direct influence on various seminal writers of the nineteenth century, and we can thus

assume a strong possibility that she also influenced them indirectly.

Besides, when we read such diverse works as F. D. Maurice's The Conscience, Lectures on Casuistry, (1868)--a copy of which he sent to George Eliot whom he greatly admired-- and F. H. Bradley's Ethical Studies (1874), we recognise certain similarities. It is more profitable in such a case to assume that nineteenth-century thinkers held in common a certain set of assumptions and preoccupations (and, as a result, shared a common moral discourse) than to try to establish that one author influenced another. The basic problem for a philosophical approach to George Eliot is that if we concentrate on her ideas we risk ignoring the novels as novels, by disregarding the complex patterning of characterisation and plot, and the blend of irony and compassion in her portrayal of individual human beings.

A more profitable critical approach to George Eliot as a novelist can be categorised as formalistic. Critics of this persuasion, such as Barbara Hardy, Reva Stump, and W. J. Harvey, treat George Eliot's novels as complete, self-contained worlds. Instead of concentrating on the relationship between her ideas and nineteenth-century thought in general, they focus almost exclusively on the subtle interplay within the novels. Whereas a philosophical analysis of George Eliot may lose sight of the texture of her novels, formalist criticism which ignores or discounts the intellectual background may be equally distorting. Patricia Beer, for example, extols the character of Fedalma in The Spanish Gypsy as the one instance in which George Eliot allows her heroine to break out of the traditional womanly role and take on the leadership of the Zincali. As this is the sole instance of such female heroism, Patricia Beer is forced to conclude that George Eliot permits such behaviour in a poem whereas she does not countenance it in a novel which would reach a wider audience.⁹ However, a study of the psychological assumptions of the period reveals that in this poem,

as in the late novel, Daniel Deronda, George Eliot utilises the evolutionary psychologists' belief in the possibility of racial inheritance, and assimilates this belief to her moral absolute, duty. In this way, Fedalma is constrained to take on the leadership of the Zincoli by the unmodifiable facts of her ancestry; she is not the free spirit envisaged by Patricia Beer.

The two approaches can lead to fundamentally different conclusions about George Eliot's treatment of her characters. George Levine, writing within the framework of his examination of her ideas, and seeing a similarity to the thought of J. S. Mill in her compromise between the concepts of determinism and freedom, maintains that "what is essential is that she felt she was free to will and responsible for her acts at the same time that she believed in universal causality."¹⁰ On the other hand, Miriam Allott, responding to the pervasive melancholy of the later novels, with their sense of frustrated possibilities, limitations, and waste, declares that George Eliot must have "'convinced her nerves' of the need to act and write as if human beings were indeed the free agents which she longed them to be--free, that is, to command their lives in accordance with their own 'inductions as to what is for their good and evil.'" ¹¹ Are these two writers making, in effect, two quite divergent statements about George Eliot or is it just a case of different critical perspectives? An historian of ideas, concentrating on the intellectual framework of George Eliot's novels will inevitably discover affinities between her thought as displayed in the novels and that of her contemporaries, Spencer, Lewes or J. S. Mill. He will observe the paradox of her "soft determinism," ¹² her attempt to reconcile irreversible laws with a belief in the possibility of "willing strongly." ¹³ And in this respect he will be presenting an accurate picture. But a literary critic who concentrates far more on the affective tone of the novels is likely to reach the conclusion that while George

Eliot wanted, even needed, to believe in a freely operating will--otherwise how can man advance to a more morally enlightened state with greater emphasis on fellowship and sympathy, and less on a self-seeking "amoral individualism"? ¹⁴ --nonetheless her prevailing mood is bleak and despondent and her view of human potential is far from promising. These views are not mutually exclusive but represent honest attempts to respond to different levels of George Eliot's presentation of the human dilemma. The epigraph she takes from Rasselas, for chapter 61 of Middlemarch, is appropriate. "'Inconsistencies,' answered Imlac, 'cannot both be right, but imputed to man they may both be true.'" ¹⁵ However much a critic may desire to take "a firm footing" like Mr Casaubon so that "the vast field of mythical constructions becomes intelligible, nay luminous with the reflected light of correspondences," ¹⁶ this is not possible. U. C. Knoepfelmacher laments the bifocation in George Eliot criticism between those who regard her primarily as a representative nineteenth-century intellectual and those who consider her first and foremost as a novelist. He calls for "a cohesive approach" that will combine "the methods of the 'new criticism' with those of the 'history of ideas.'" ¹⁷

My aim is to offer a synthesis of these two methods, to find a satisfactory bridge between an approach to George Eliot's novels that examines her relationship to the background of ideas and an approach which is exclusively formalistic. Close attention to the texts of the novels makes it possible to isolate and identify certain key ideas and constellations of ideas which can then be related to the general background of nineteenth century thought. In this way it is possible to formulate the set of constructs by means of which George Eliot came to terms with the external world. Once we have located these constructs in the novels, we can ascertain their effectiveness as determinants of action, as motive forces for characterisation and plot. Initially, therefore, I will concentrate on

identifying the set of mental constructs which becomes the framework of the different novels. Thus I will discuss George Eliot's thought under the general headings of Determinism, Psychological Assumptions, and Moral Development.

But, in setting out a description of certain of George Eliot's key ideas and assumptions, it is necessary to make clear that I am by no means attempting a chronological analysis of the development of her thought. Occasionally there will be a temporal progression if only because one idea superseded another in the nineteenth century. Evolutionary psychology, for example, incorporated both the learning theories of the association psychologists and the evolutionary hypothesis contained in Darwin's The Origin of Species, and George Eliot's acceptance of its tenets inevitably reveals a similar progression. And even if I am not emphasising chronological development, it is still the case that any attempt to outline different ideas will suggest a linear progression. Yet George Eliot's ideas do not exist in isolation from one another. The web imagery which pervades so much of her writing as an analogue for the interdependence and complexity of human lives as well as for the environmental pressures that restrict them is also appropriate to an analysis of her thought. I would be most unwilling, therefore, to imitate Mr Tulliver and by an indiscriminate tug suggest that her ideas were inextricably entwined.¹⁸ It is more a case of one idea entailing another.

In dealing with George Eliot's ideas, therefore, we are attempting to unravel "the mingled thread" which is "so curiously twisted together"¹⁹ so that we can examine it carefully. The linear progression of my analysis from an examination of determinism and psychological assumptions to a description of moral growth with all its ramifications is not arbitrary. I deliberately start with the intractable and the impersonal--the irrevers-

ible laws--and work towards the yielding, the dynamic and the personal world of individual moral growth, and ultimately of moral growth that comes about as the result of the influence of one personality on another. An analysis of ideas is constantly in danger of becoming too abstract, too remote from the actual novels. We are not examining tracts or philosophic treatises. It may be exciting to track down certain of George Eliot's ideas and relate them to contemporary thought, but we must not lose sight of the fact that the real focus of our attention is the struggling individual as his life is unfolded within the world of the novels. The rich texture of George Eliot's thought, the set of mental constructs by which she sought to understand the world she lived in and the endless variety of human nature, provide a framework for the novels. They constitute a mental scaffolding. If we examine the novels in terms of this scaffolding, we can recognise where it offers a spaciousness for the character's development and where it imposes restrictions on character growth and plot. Once we have identified George Eliot's basic moral and psychological assumptions we can evaluate their effectiveness as determinants of action, and assess their impact on her control of authorial distance and on the possibilities for choice that she offers her characters.

*mental
figures?*

Thus in one area, George Eliot's system of beliefs provides a fruitful tension in the novels. In her efforts to depict both the "hard, unaccommodating Actual" ²⁰ and the struggling individual, she has to shift her perspective from the one to the other, and reveal the dissonance that exists between what the character believes is the case and what really is the case. This is the source of much of the irony of the novels so that while, for example, we rejoice at Gwendolen Harleth's defiant energy, we can see the pathos of her having wandered into a swamp wearing her satin shoes. ²¹

Similarly the scientific and literary allusions create a network of references which relate the personal and the individual circumstances to

a wider, more universal situation. It is only her anxious control of her characters and of her readers' response to those characters that we regret. A certain measure of freedom is required even in a world dominated by "universal causality,"²² if a character is to accept responsibility for his actions and achieve moral growth. But if the nature of that moral growth is closely circumscribed by a moral absolutism and a hierarchical construct then we will find restrictions on the ways in which a character is allowed to define himself within his particular community and on the sorts of choices open to him. And the rigidity that this entails will be partially concealed by the authorial approval meted out to those who are morally developing. Ultimately what this means, is, that if we accept George Eliot's premises, we can see that her conclusions are irrefutable. Within her inflexible set of co-ordinates her characters do achieve carefully controlled moral growth and do learn to transcend their egoistic limitations. They are socialised. Freedom, in George Eliot's scheme, is "necessity understood,"²³ and in our acceptance of her frame of reference we are also asked to adhere to this definition. When we understand the necessity that presses on her characters, we can also recognise the small measure of freedom that they are allowed and the possibility of moral growth which this confers. If, however, by an analysis of George Eliot's system of beliefs, we are able to step outside her framework, we can see a sad loss of freedom and autonomy. The characters are not encouraged to rebel against their circumstances, because a failure to accept the reality of the circumstances which oppress them is a sign that they are morally lightweight. Ironically, if we refuse to accept George Eliot's universe, we stand convicted, in her terms, of "moral stupidity,"²⁴ and range ourselves on the side of such superlative egoists as Gwendolen Harleth. Yet within the terms of her own set of beliefs, we can see an implicit recognition that moral growth is correlative with freedom. Even allowing for

our twentieth-century preoccupation with freedom and autonomy, I still maintain that with certain characters, George Eliot suggests a greater degree of freedom than she has really provided. Maggie Tulliver's habit of self-renunciation incapacitates her and makes it almost impossible for her to "choose" at all. Dorothea Brooke looks as if she is making a dramatic choice in marrying Will Ladislaw, but the only alternative she is offered is to stagnate at Lowick. Deronda's acceptance of his Jewishness is constantly foreshadowed throughout the novel; he has a curriculum vitae. Yet we are asked to commend his "choice." We seem to have been offered in these characters greater freedom than is actually the case. An analysis of George Eliot's fundamental ideology reveals that she holds her characters, situations, and indeed her readers in too confining a hand. This constitutes an undoubted limitation in the novels.

My first chapters examine her basic ideas. The later chapters offer a critical assessment of those ideas. They seek to substantiate my claim that George Eliot's incorporation of fundamental nineteenth-century assumptions into the texture of her novels constitutes in some areas an enrichment and in others a decided limitation.

Let us now begin our analysis of George Eliot's system of beliefs with an examination of how she achieved her compromise between "necessitarianism" and the ability "to will strongly." ²⁵

Determinism.

"Necessitarianism--I hate the ugly word," ¹ George Eliot wrote in 1875 to Mrs Ponsonby. This friend was in need of such rallying words as she was showing signs of succumbing to the paralysing effect of fatalism, the "lazy fallacy" or the "argument of sloth," ² as William Chase Greene calls it. George Eliot next expressed her gratitude that "every fresh morning is an opportunity that one can look forward to for exerting one's will," and she declared how important it was to reconcile necessitarianism "with the practice of willing strongly, willing to will strongly, and so on." ³ Any such reconciliation, however, raises the question of how it is possible to allow for any measure of free will in a world dominated by "universal causality." ⁴ In this section I intend to relate George Eliot's ideas to the general background of nineteenth century thought and show just how she achieved such a reconciliation.

George Eliot's acceptance of the principles of necessitarianism appears as early as 1851 with her review of R. W. Mackay's The Progress of the Intellect for the Westminster Review. There she writes of "the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world--of that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science, but which is still perversely ignored in our social organisation, our ethics and our religion." Her argument concludes with the categorical statement that "it is this invariability of sequence which can alone give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible." ⁵ She might not have gone so far as to share James Mill's optimistic claim that, given the time, he could "write a book which would make the human mind as plain as the road from Charing Cross to St Paul's" ⁶--she had too

realistic an appreciation of the immensity of the task to do that--but she would have concurred with the underlying sentiment. She expressed herself in agreement, for example, with the "fundamental doctrine" of Charles Bray's book, The Philosophy of Necessity (1841), that "the mind presents itself under the same condition of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena," but qualified this with the rider that mental phenomena are "proportionately difficult to discover as [they are] ^{an} more complex." ⁷ But she and Lewes were in the vanguard of nineteenth-century thought in their acceptance that the mind was subject to the determining laws that obtained for the physical organism. Other thinkers were more cautious. Nineteenth-century thinkers who were concerned with the nature of the mind fall into two categories. The first were philo- ^{and} sophers, castigated by Francis Gall for working "in a closet." ⁸ In this group belong Auguste Comte, the Mills, and Herbert Spencer. The other group consists of scientists actively engaged in neurophysiological experimentation and research. Lewes is interesting because he initially belonged to the first category but he was mortified by Huxley's description of him as a mere "book scientist" ⁹ and became increasingly occupied with genuine research.

Most nineteenth-century thinkers, philosophers or scientists, were bedevilled by the basic assumption that the mind was somehow a separate entity, or even, as Lewes scathingly puts it, an "abstraction." ¹⁰ Even a brief survey of the development of nineteenth century neurophysiology reveals that as physical research into the function of the brain became more detailed and accurate, the scientists had to struggle against their wish to deny the evidence that the cerebral cortex was involved in the sensory-motor functions of the body. G. H. Lewes stands out in this connection for his unflagging missionary zeal to persuade his readers to accept the mind as a "function of the organism." ¹¹ In his 1845

review of the major work of the French scientist, Francis Gall, Sur les fonctions de cerveau, et sur celles de chacune de ces parties (1822-25), Lewes acclaims Gall's "vision of Psychology as a branch of Biology" ¹² and credits Gall with rescuing "the problem of mental functions from Metaphysics." ¹³ However the battle was not to be won so easily. In 1878 in The Study of Psychology, Lewes is still having to refute the enduring notion of the Will as an entity separate from the ordinary functioning of the body and is criticising what he calls the "speculative mistake" of personifying the "abstraction Will as something apart from the total of volitional impulses, and, therefore, removed from their conditions." ¹⁴ "A metaphysical abstraction," as he points out, "has no physical determinates" and is not "admitted within the rigorous limits of determinism." ¹⁵

It is of course the phrase "rigorous limits of determinism" that is the stumbling block, because it was believed that to give up the notion of the Mind (or Will) as a separate entity and subsume its functions under the general laws for the functions of the body, was to question the whole basis of morality and the freedom of the will. We have seen that George Eliot, far from denying the implications of such a deterministic account of the mind, welcomed it, seeing in the "invariability of sequence" that "which can alone give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible." ¹⁶ Implicit in these statements about the functioning of the mind are not only assumptions about the body/mind problem but also assumptions about causality. In The Study of Psychology, Lewes remarks that "because the Will is thus the abstract expression of the product of Experience, it is educable, and becomes amenable to the Moral Law." ¹⁷ We are in no doubt that George Eliot concurred with this belief that the "Will is educable"; a brief examination of an episode in Daniel Deronda bears this out.

Gwendolen fears that she will be overwhelmed by her hatred of

Grandcourt. Deronda refrains from uselessly suggesting to her that she should feel differently, but instead indicates to her a meditation technique. She can use her fear to intensify her self-awareness and provide a means of self-restraint. Deronda admonishes Gwendolen in these words:

✓ Turn your fear into a safeguard. Keep your dread fixed on the idea of increasing that remorse which is so bitter to you. Fixed meditation may do a great deal towards defining our longing or dread. We are not always in a state of strong emotion, and when we are calm we can use our memories and gradually change the bias of our fear, as we do our tastes. Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you. Try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it as if it were a faculty, like vision. pr

This passage shows very clearly that George Eliot had no doubts that the will was educable, and her analogy with the organs of sense—"quickness of hearing," "faculty of vision"--indicates that she accepts that the mind is "inside" the physical organism, and therefore is subject to the same laws. Far from rejecting, therefore, as the behaviourists categorically do, the "causal efficacy" ¹⁹ of the feeling of self-awareness, George Eliot has Deronda attempt to provide a "felt purpose" ²⁰ by offering some motivating force to stiffen Gwendolen's will. The only thing that is in question is whether Gwendolen has sufficient strength of will to carry out Deronda's proposed programme.

If the laws of causality operate universally it is difficult to imagine a possible loophole through which a person can choose to exert his will. Such a loophole, however, is found in the distinction that was drawn between laws which could not be altered and laws which could be adapted for the purpose of instituting desired changes. In his discussion of the age-old problem of free will and determinism, Donald Mackay points out that the vexing question for moralists is not whether they are free to choose but whether they are free to change. ²¹ And it is this aspect of the determinism dilemma that most occupies George Eliot. This is the importance of her advice to Mrs Ponsonby. It is anticipated earlier in a

brief note at the end of a letter to Bessie Parkes where she promises to reform "in spite of a firm belief in necessity."²² If change is to be engineered, we need to know about the laws in order that we may work them to our advantage. Some laws are immutable but others can be used to further progress. In 1878, George Eliot wrote to Charles Ritter that "the great division of our lot is that between what is immodifiable and is the object of resignation and that which is modifiable by hopeful activity-- by new conceptions and new deeds."²³ We are confronting here a common solution adopted by necessitarian moralists. In their desire to control and manipulate in order to make an ideal world, Basil Willey sees a way of reintroducing "free will by imputing to us the power of originating [the] arrangement"²⁴ of circumstances to produce required results. Thus we have Comte's triumphant claim that "it remains in a man's power to soften and shorten crises, as soon as he grasps their reasons and foresees the issue."²⁵ In this way, the nineteenth-century belief in "invariability of sequence"²⁶ was not seen as betokening a closed system with only one possible future and with our freedom consisting merely in the fact that we cannot know for certain what that future will be. Rather it was seen as offering the liberating possibility of instituting necessary changes in education, government, social organisation and so on. George Eliot's rejection of the "ugly word, Necessitarianism"²⁷ indicates that like other nineteenth century thinkers she had no brief for the notion that the tie of antecedent over consequent implied "irresistibleness."²⁸ She would have agreed with A. J. Ayer that it was a "superstition" to believe that "causes and effects are somehow joined together like members of a chain gang."²⁹ To her, as to Lewes, Comte, Spencer, J. S. Mill and others, the relationship of cause to effect meant "uniformity of sequence."³⁰ Lewes, for example, writes that "the fact that events arrive irresistibly whenever their conditions are present,

is confused with the conception that the events must arrive whether the conditions be present or not, being fatally predetermined." He distinguishes between necessity and fatalism in these terms. "Necessity simply says that whatever is is, and will vary with varying conditions. Fatalism says that something must be; and this something cannot be modified by any modification of the conditions." ³¹ In A System of Logic, J. S. Mill writes in similar terms that what "revolts our feelings" is "humiliating to our pride" and "paralysing to our desire of excellence" is "the feeling of some intimate connexion, of some peculiar tie, or mysterious constraint exercised by the antecedent over the consequent." ³²

He provides an answer to the problem of necessitarianism in terms very similar to George Eliot's instruction to "will to will strongly" ³³ when he maintains that "we are exactly as capable of making our own character, if we will, as others are of making it for us." ³⁴ This is the compromise by which both thinkers escape from the closed system of "hard determinism," which is how William James defines such "harsh words" as "fatality, necessity, and even predetermination," and embrace "soft determinism" of which the "real name is freedom; for freedom is only necessity understood." ³⁵ Far from dismissing this solution as a "quagmire of evasion," ³⁶ as James does, George Eliot maintains that our freedom, our power of making desired moral improvement rests on just this necessary understanding. Freedom is an adjustment to lawfulness, not a state of anarchy. The "immodifiable" laws concern the "hard non-moral outward conditions"; ³⁷ the laws which can be modified, however slowly, concern moral issues and are man-made. Many of these are indeed inadequate and in need of adjustment but the process of change must be gradual. Almost at the end of her life George Eliot wrote to Elma Stuart that "the reason why societies change slowly is, because individual men and women cannot have their natures changed by doctrine and can only be wrought on by

little and little." ³⁸ Any suggestion that freedom means an overthrowing of existing laws and an entry into a state of unregulated impulse is soundly scotched, for example, in the following rebuke offered to the youthful enthusiasm of Felix Holt by the Dissenting minister, Mr Lyon. He provides a musical analogy which refers indirectly to the harmony of the spheres and suggests that conflict and discord are inevitable while mankind is in its present state of imperfection. His reference to a "higher rule" is especially pertinent to my later discussion of George Eliot's moral thought.

"You yourself are a lover of freedom, and a bold rebel against usurping authority. But the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule, and not to wander in mere lawlessness. Wherefore, I beseech you, seem not to say that liberty is licence. And I apprehend . . . that there is a law in music, disobedience whereunto would bring us in our singing to the level of shrieking maniacs or howling beasts: so that herein we are well instructed how true liberty can be naught but the transfer of obedience from the will of one or of a few men to that will which is the norm or rule for all men. And though the transfer may sometimes be but an erroneous direction of search, yet is the search good and necessary to the ultimate finding. And even as in music, where all obey and concur to one end . . . so will it be in that crowning time of the millennial reign, when our daily prayer will be fulfilled, and one law shall be written on all hearts, and be the very structure of all thought, and be the principle of all action." ³⁹

Mr Lyon shies away from the notion of unfettered liberty, which he sees as anarchy. The musical analogy of the "singing" of "shrieking maniacs" or "howling beasts" reveals his anxiety. Obedience to the laws thus constitutes freedom; it does not impose a sense of restraint. Lewes expresses a similar sentiment when he claims that "in organic, as in social life, the indispensable condition of perfect action is the co-operation of independent agents--the Freedom which is subordinated to Law, and the Law which secures Freedom." ⁴⁰ In this way the rules of antecedent and consequent by which a character's future actions are determined by his past actions are seen to constitute a kind of logical entailment and the very existence of a social setting which modifies and is modified by each individual becomes the all-embracing structure, the "form" within which

that individual defines himself. We are paradoxically more free if we choose to accept the "immodifiable" laws than if we disregard their inevitability.

Another explanation of how freedom is possible at all within a strict notation is offered by Lewes in his section on "The Freedom of the Will" in The Study of Psychology (1878), where he writes that "the vessel which is swept onwards by the waves does not determine the individual movement of the sailors. Each sailor knows that he moves with the vessel, but knows also that he is free to move to and fro on the deck."⁴¹ He is saying that the ship has to obey certain laws of wind and tide; in addition there are the structural limitations of its size and how it is built. At the same time, the sailor on board this ship has a certain nervous system which determines his muscle power and co-ordination, and a certain psychological constitution which determines whether he feels courageous or timid, active or indolent. All these factors or "conditions" have to be taken into account in a discussion of the sailor's "choice" of walking about the deck.

Lewes is describing here the interlocking systems which make up the physical universe, all of which obey their own laws and functions but which still, as he maintains, allow some measure of independence. "The organism," as he says, "is a part of Nature, and is swept along in the great current of natural forces. But the organism is also a system of forces, and this system has within itself the conditions of its special actions; just as our world is a part of Nature, yet, being a system, its movements are in some sense independent of the solar system."⁴²

If a human being is one such "system of forces" and human society is another and both are subject to their restraining and limiting "conditions," this provides two or more sets of interlocking conditions. The great complexity that this implies, not only makes accurate predictions difficult

but also allows for a degree of flexibility and creativity. This does not mean that such flexibility or such creativity is uncaused, that it lies outside the universally operating succession of antecedent and consequent. It just means that any concatenation of antecedents may lead to new and unexpected consequents, although if we but knew enough we could trace the process quite systematically. Future events, therefore, are often unpredictable, not because they are arbitrary but because we are ignorant of all the factors involved. Accordingly the outcome of Maggie Tulliver's struggle against her increasing attraction for Stephen Guest cannot be deduced by us from our "knowledge of [her] characteristics." George Eliot warns us that although we "have known Maggie a long while," we need to be told, "not her characteristics, but her history, which is a thing hardly to be predicted even from the completest knowledge of such characteristics." ⁴³ Complexity confers uncertainty and unpredictability. Recognising this, Lewes maintains that there are "two classes of effects markedly distinguishable as Resultants and Emergents." ⁴⁴ His theory of Emergents constitutes his most important and original contribution to the history of science. With Resultants the process is clear, "every resultant is clearly traceable in its components, because these are homogeneous and commensurable. It is otherwise," however, "with emergents, when, instead of adding measurable motion to measurable motion, or things of one kind to other individuals of their kind, there is a co-operation of things of unlike kinds." ⁴⁵ Thus he concludes that

although each effect is the resultant of its components, the product of its factors, we cannot always trace the steps of the process, so as to see in the product the mode of operation of each factor. In this latter case, I propose to call the effect an emergent. It arises out of the combined agencies, but in a form which does not display the agents in action.... ⁴⁶ Were all effects simply resultants, in the sense here specified, our deductive power would be almost absolute; a mathematical expression would include all phenomena. It is precisely because effects are mostly emergents that Deduction is insecure, and Experience is requisite to confirm even the most plausible deductions. ⁴⁷

The intricacies of human nature, the fact, for instance, as George Eliot tells us, that "our speech even when we are most single-minded can never take its line absolutely from one impulse,"⁴⁸ and the complex inter-relationships within society are neither "homogeneous" nor "commensurable." Thus they produce emergent effects. There is always likely to be some undetectable factor which complicates our understanding of the process of interaction, or leaves us in doubt as to its result. In a similar vein, François Jacob, describing the increasing sophistication of response in living organisms, writes that

Together with the capacity of response to stimuli, the degrees of freedom left to the organism in the choice of responses also increase. In man, the number of possible responses becomes so high that one can speak of the "free will" so dear to philosophers. But flexibility has its limits. Even when the programme gives the organism only an ability, that of learning, for instance, it imposes restrictions on what can be learnt, on when learning is to take place and under what conditions....man must still be in a favourable environment at a certain stage of his development in order to fulfil this potential.⁴⁹

As Jacob indicates, in biological terms, unlimited freedom is an illusion. Greater sophistication of response does not confer freedom. We still have to obey certain laws which prescribe how, when, and where development can take place. He also reveals that there is a precariousness, that there are manifold ways in which environment may not be favourable and development, as a result, may be inhibited or stunted.

George Eliot gives a striking instance of this precariousness in Romola where we learn that the heroine's potential for growth was lying dormant until she came under the charismatic spell of Savonarola's personality. "Romola had had contact with no mind that could stir the larger possibilities of her nature; they lay folded and crushed like embryonic wings, making no element in her consciousness beyond an occasional vague uneasiness."⁵⁰ The possibility for spiritual growth was there but it had to wait for the right "conditions."

This description of a freedom (however slight) made possible within a framework of universal causality reveals the nineteenth-century shift from a mechanistic to an organicist analogue. Earlier, when the events of the world were seen to resemble the working of a well-regulated machine, there was no room for flexibility or the creative accident. Now, however, Lewes can contrast the "spontaneity" of organisms with the "fatality" ⁵¹ of machines. He can further comment that "no machine is educable. All its actions may be predicted. What it does today, it will do tomorrow, and without variation in the way of doing it." ⁵² George Eliot can ask to be regarded not as a "machine always grinding out the same material or spinning the same sort of web" but to be granted "freedom to write out [her] own varying unfolding self." ⁵³

We have learnt that George Eliot's reconciliation of freedom and necessity was two-fold. Freedom is "necessity understood" ⁵⁴ but it is also uncertainty and unpredictability. The laws never cease to operate. By accepting their inevitability we do not fritter away our energies. We can even learn to direct and use certain laws to bring about desired change. At the same time, the sheer complexity of the factors in any given situation produces a slight area of flexibility, even if only in the uncertainty it confers as to results. The laws provide a framework; the embryological images suggest a blueprint for growth and change. Freedom is possible only within these strictly confined limits.

We have traced briefly the way in which George Eliot theoretically reconciled necessity and free will. This leaves us with a situation where we are entitled to expect that her characters will be given some slight measure of freedom, some room or reprieve within the limits set by their own natures and the circumstances that confront them, some conscious awareness of their own freedom and of choice. ⁵⁵

Let us now examine the novels to see whether George Eliot is able to convert her reconciliation of freedom and necessity into a satisfactory framework within which she can work out the possibilities of growth or decline in individual characters.

The philosophic problem of conciliation leads in the novels to a technical problem of point of view. To present convincingly a world of causal necessity and constraint, a different perspective, even perhaps a different language is required from that which is suitable for an analysis and description of the inwardness of a character, his motivation, his struggles and his triumphs. If a purely extraspective viewpoint is adopted there is no difference discernible in the process by which a raindrop gets to the ocean and a man gets to the office.⁵⁶ ~~They are equally without purpose.~~ It is only when we take the man's motivation, his mental processes into account that the two activities of the man and the raindrop are not similar. But shifting perspective to allow for a man's own account of his behaviour, allowing the validity of an intropsective viewpoint, may be merely to introduce what Herbert Spencer calls our "subjective illusion"⁵⁷ of free will. "'Sir,' said Johnson, in his characteristic way, 'we know the will is free, and there's an end of the matter.'" ⁵⁸ But unfortunately it is only the beginning.

The twentieth century behavioural psychologist, B. F. Skinner, comments that "it requires a special verbal environment to impose consciousness on behaviour by inducing a person to respond to his own body while he is behaving. If consciousness seems to have a causal effect, it is the effect of the special environment which induces self-observation."⁵⁹ George Eliot would not have accepted Skinner's statement. She accepted the "causal efficacy"⁶⁰ of the desire to change-- Alexander Bain calls it "Rhetorical efficiency."⁶¹ The episode I have

already mentioned from Daniel Deronda, where Deronda suggests to Gwen-dolen that only by constant watchfulness can she protect herself from committing a rash and irrevocable wrong towards Grandcourt, clearly reveals that George Eliot sees such self-awareness as one of the strongest factors in a character's regeneration.

We need be in no doubt as to George Eliot's recognition of this two-fold world, of the poignancy of the shifting perspective between the reality of the causal universe and a character's own representation of his place in this universe. She wrote to John Chapman (July, 1852) of her certainty that "the thought which is to mould the Future has for its root a belief in necessity, that a nobler presentation of humanity has yet to be given in resignation to individual nothingness." ⁶² Some twenty years later she wrote to Mrs Ponsonby, whose struggles with fatalism I have already mentioned.

As to the necessary combinations through which life is manifested, and which seem to present themselves to you as a hideous fatalism, which ought logically to petrify your volition--have they, in fact, any such influence on your ordinary course of action in the primary affairs of your existence as a human, social, domestic creature? And if they don't hinder you from taking measures for a bath ... why should they hinder you from a line of resolve in a higher strain of duty to your ideal, both for yourself and others? But the consideration of molecular physics is not the direct ground of human love and moral action, any more than it is the direct means of composing a noble picture or of enjoying great music. One might as well hope to dissect one's own body and be merry in doing it, as take molecular physics (in which you must banish from your field of view what is specifically human) to be your dominant guide, your determiner of motives, in what is solely human. That every study has its bearing on every other is true; but pain and relief, love and sorrow, have their peculiar history which make an experience and knowledge over and above the swing of atoms. ⁶³

One more quotation, this time from Middlemarch, shows George Eliot's explicit awareness of the double perspective I have been describing. Discussing Bulstrode's anguished attempts to explain his own situation and actions in suitably religious terminology, (what she calls "doctrinal references to superhuman ends" ⁶⁴), George Eliot informs us that "even while we are talking and meditating about the earth's orbit and the solar

system, what we feel and adjust our movements to is the stable earth and the changing day." ⁶⁵

In the novels we have two narrative views, the analytic and the sympathetic. Felicia Bonaparte comments that the treatment of Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede provides the "paradigm pattern which Eliot follows through all her subsequent novels." ⁶⁶ She adds that "against the voice of the analytic narrator who traces the inevitable evolution from cause to effect, the sympathetic narrator calls for that human evaluation of the events which renders Hetty's fate an object of compassion." ⁶⁷ In the tension between these two narrative views lies much of the irony of the novels. We are asked to recognise both the intransigence of the world confronting the characters, the "hard unaccommodating Actual which has never consulted our taste and is entirely unselect," ⁶⁸ and at the same time to feel compassion and fellowship for those characters who fail to see clearly, who do not take fully into account the weight of circumstances.

Later, I will deal more fully with the implications of this two-fold narrative view, with its interlocking of two planes of reality, the subjective and the objective. What, for example, does it mean in terms of the presentation of a character like Mr Casaubon in Middlemarch?

George Eliot shifts her perspective to show him to us in the distorting mirror of his neighbours' sensibilities; we also see how he appears in his own eyes and then are given an authorial overview.

This "binocular vision" ⁶⁹ that she maintained in the novels, while it is technically a projection of the philosophic conundrum of necessity and free will, also provides a means of focussing on her belief that the fate of any character is not dependent on either circumstances or temperament, but on an interaction between the two which it may well be too difficult to predict with any accuracy. As she tells us about

Lydgate,

He was at a starting-point which makes a man's career a fine subject for betting, if there were any gentlemen given to that amusement who could appreciate the complicated probabilities of an arduous purpose, with all the possible thwartings and furtherings of circumstance, all the niceties of inward balance, by which a man swims and makes his point or else is carried headlong. ⁷⁰

The emphasis is given equally to circumstances and to inward balance, and George Eliot continues with the remark that "character too is a process and an unfolding." ⁷¹ We can recognise here Lewes' "emergents" as well as a quite explicit organicism. Lydgate is not a mechanical creature, wound up like a clock to perform predictably and inevitably; he is rather an embryo which may or may not develop satisfactorily. There is no escaping the philosophic paradox of George Eliot's beliefs, the paradox that "man is in subjection to the external world, though he also to a certain extent controls it." ⁷²

It is this paradox that underlies her stringent comment that "if we had been greater, circumstance would have been less strong against us." ⁷³ She thus sets herself the challenge of revealing convincingly to her readers both the strength of those circumstances, the provincial town of Middlemarch which "counted on swallowing Lydgate and assimilating him very comfortably," ⁷⁴ the unrelenting wife who "mastered" ⁷⁵ him, as well as those features of his own nature which diminished his resistance to those very circumstances. And she has to do this without our feeling that the dice are weighted unbearably against Lydgate from the very start. It is the Aristotelian problem of what kind of man will arouse our pity and terror. His humanity needs to be close enough to ours that we do not reject him as a monster of depravity and yet he must seem to maintain control over his own situation so that we feel he could have done otherwise if he had chosen differently, or in this case, if he had been "greater." George Eliot shows us quite clearly Lydgate's hamartia, his fatal flaw or error of judgement, in his

"spots of commonness." ⁷⁶ So that although "about his ordinary bearing there was a certain fling, a fearless expectation of success, a confidence in his own powers and integrity much fortified by contempt for petty obstacles or seductions of which he had had no experience," ⁷⁷ he came in the end to be counted among those who are "shapen after the average and fit to be packed by the gross." ⁷⁸

At this point, we confront a difficulty that W. J. Harvey expressly warns us about, a difficulty of not confusing the "artistic inevitability of a novel with determinism as a philosophy." ⁷⁹ "In so far as a novel is successfully created," he maintains, "it will seem to have an inevitable tightness and finality; given these characters and this situation the outcome will have a logic and justness we cannot but accept. But this is a by-product of artistic success; it has nothing to do with naturalism as a literary kind nor with determinism as a world view." ⁸⁰

How then do we decide that a character such as Lydgate is not constrained, not compelled by forces outside his potential control but has some freedom to choose, is permitted some measure of autonomy? Within the narrow loophole of freedom, which, I have indicated, is all that George Eliot allows, there is not an indefinite range of possibilities, not an open-ended future. We do not find in her novels the random, the arbitrary, the totally unexpected, nor do we find a character making dramatic and drastic changes in his behaviour and attitudes.

However, if Lydgate were not free to choose, if he were constrained or compelled, there would be no suggestion that he was responsible, accountable for his actions; we would have the impression that he was travelling along a rigidly defined path and that at no point was there the remotest possibility of divergence. We would have no sense of crisis, of suspense; there would be no accompanying "penumbra of unrealized possibilities," ⁸¹ no suggestion of what might have happened "if only ..."

And this is definitely not the case. We do feel that if Lydgate could only have exerted himself a little here, had only controlled his impetuous and impatient tongue there, and had struggled to find a vocabulary to describe his and Rosamond's behaviour that would have been intelligible and acceptable to them both, things would have been different. This accords very much with Lewes' description of the factors involved in any decision, when he says that "in psychological language, the resultant is the chosen motive, and is conditioned by three determinants,--1) The nature of the stimulus; 2) The momentary state of the mind; 3) The individuality of the person."⁸² This suggests that a slight alteration of potency in one or other of the factors will create a different combination and that it is this which provides the possibility of a small degree of freedom, the loophole both George Eliot and Lewes allow for exercising the will. This does not suggest that the character will act inconsistently; his behaviour will still be seen to accord with the rules governing his particular organism. George Eliot frequently refers to the "bias" of a person's nature. In the following quotation from Middlemarch Mr Casaubon has just been told the serious nature of his illness and George Eliot stresses that even here, at the moment of facing death, he does not behave in a way that is inconsistent with his "bias." "When the commonplace, 'We must all die' transforms itself suddenly into the acute consciousness 'I must die--and soon,' then death grapples us, and his fingers are cruel....In such an hour the mind does not change its lifelong bias, but carries it onward in imagination to the other side of death, gazing backward--perhaps with the divine calm of beneficence, perhaps with the petty anxieties of self-assertion."⁸³

But George Eliot is careful to distinguish between those characters who, like Tom Tulliver, are "inexorable, unbending, unmodifiable"⁸⁴ and those she shows as having the possibility of growth and change. In her

discussion of Lydgate in chapter 15 of Middlemarch she comments, as I have already mentioned, that "character too is a process and an unfolding."⁸⁵ The word "unfolding" is especially interesting because of its embryological connotation and its suggestion that a man's growth will be defined by an embryological blueprint. We are reminded of Mr Irwine's remark to Arthur Donnithorne in Adam Bede that "a man can never do anything at variance with his own nature."⁸⁶ The following epigraph from chapter 41 of Felix Holt expresses the same idea.

for the soul can grow,
As embryos, that live and move but blindly,
Burst from the dark, emerge regenerate,⁸⁷
And lead a life of vision and of choice.

Growth is therefore seen to be possible but within set limits, just as freedom is limited and restricted. Character is seen to unfold and develop but it is still consistent with its own nature. We will find, therefore, that in our analysis of a particular character we need to concentrate our attention on the small "determining" actions that precede the major act of choice. Iris Murdoch states that "the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business which goes on all the time and not a grandiose leaping about unimpeded at important moments. The moral life, in this view, is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off between the occurrence of explicit moral choices."⁸⁸ In Middlemarch, on this assumption, it is more rewarding to consider not just the fact that Lydgate votes for Tyke, thus cementing his relationship with Bulstrode in the eyes of the Middlemarchers who do not find Bulstrode's piety endearing. We need also to consider the minute adjustments of expediency and self-interest with the wider recognition of social factors, what George Eliot calls "niceties of inward balance,"⁸⁹ for it is in these preliminaries to action that we learn most about character. W. J. Harvey regards the exercise of the will as one of the "constitutive" categories by means of which we come to

know a character. He mentions two factors which he feels are important to this category: the range of choices offered and the sort of chooser the character is shown to be.⁹⁰

I am maintaining, then, that we learn more about what sort of chooser Lydgate is, by examining his state of mind prior to his voting for Tyke, than we do by just registering the fact that he **does vote for Tyke** and that it has certain consequences.

Lydgate, a newcomer to Middlemarch, is dependent on the patronage of Bulstrode if he is to have a free rein to carry out the researches which he sees as so important to the advancement of medical science. He reluctantly recognises a parallel between his situation and that of a government member who has to toe the party line and propitiate the Minister if he is to have a place in the Cabinet. He feels an extreme dislike for "the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity."⁹¹ His first encounter with such complexity occurs when he has to decide whether to vote for Bulstrode's candidate, Tyke, or for Farebrother for whom Lydgate feels a genuine friendship. However, Farebrother has the regrettable habit of playing at whist for money and Lydgate's young arrogance prevents him from sympathising with the financial pressures that might induce even a man of the cloth to gamble in this way. Farebrother, further, has generously indicated that he will bear no grudge against Lydgate if he should choose to vote for Tyke. This is the first testing-ground that George Eliot devises in which to try Lydgate's mettle.

The first thing we learn about Lydgate as a chooser is that "without telling himself the reason, he deferred the predetermination on which side he should give his vote."⁹² Far from sitting down to deliberate over the issue, he allows himself to consider it each morning while he is shaving, which is hardly giving the matter his full attention.

"It would really have been a matter of total indifference to him--that is to say, he would have taken the more convenient side, and given his vote for the appointment of Tyke without any hesitation--if he had not cared personally for Mr Farebrother." ⁹³ We see that he clearly recognises here no degree of social responsibility, unlike Dorothea, who, in a later episode of the book, when she has the living of Lowick to bestow, takes her responsibility very seriously. However the "hampering thread-like pressure" ⁹⁴ disturbs him, but only to the point of his hoping that some other factor will intervene which will prevent him from having to compromise himself. Accordingly,

when he set out for the hospital, his hope was really in the chance that discussion might somehow give a new aspect to the question, and make the scale dip so as to exclude the necessity for voting. I think he trusted a little also to the energy which is begotten by circumstances--some feeling rushing warmly and making resolve easy, while debate in cold blood had only made it more difficult. However it was, he did not distinctly say to himself on which side he would vote; and all the while he was inwardly resenting the subjection which had been forced upon him. It would have seemed beforehand like a ridiculous piece of bad logic that he, with his unmixd resolutions of independence and his select purposes, would find himself at the very outset in the grasp of petty alternatives, each of which was repugnant to him. In his student's chambers, he had prearranged his social action quite differently." ⁹⁵

This long passage is worth quoting in full because it reveals so clearly those aspects of Lydgate's nature which contribute to his downfall: his fastidious recoil from political realities and a certain assumption of superiority, of arrogance towards his neighbours and their concerns; a deferring of decisions and a reliance on impulse or spontaneous action. All these add up to a lack of knowledge, both of himself and of the factors ranged against him. It is not enough to dismiss Middlemarch as a "petty medium" ⁹⁶ and hope by so doing to neutralise any impact it may have on him. And his wish that something will come up at the last minute that will save him from compromising himself appears derisory in the face of what actually happens. He not only arrives too late to hear

or benefit from any preliminary debate but is invidiously forced into giving the casting vote, which he certainly does under the influence of some "feeling rushing warmly and making resolve easy" ⁹⁷ even if the feeling were not quite what he has in mind. Riled by Mr Wrench's assumption that of course Lydgate will vote for Tyke, he acts defiantly, determined to show that such needling suggestions of partisanship do not trouble him, and does indeed vote for Tyke.

In terms of Harvey's "constitutive category" of freedom, we can see that Lydgate scarcely qualifies as a chooser at all, in the sense of his making deliberate conscious choices; rather, he allows himself to be rushed into choosing under a spurt of impulsive feeling. It comes as no surprise to us then, to witness how he comes to engage himself to Rosamond. Overwhelmed by the unexpected glimpse of genuine feeling in her which shakes him from flirtation into love, he embraces her and half an hour later leaves the house "an engaged man, whose soul was not his own, but the woman's to whom he had bound himself." ⁹⁸ We can, therefore, all the more appreciate the irony of the concluding comment of the chapter dealing with the chaplaincy affair. Lydgate has had a conversation with Farebrother, who, true to his word, has shown no injured vanity that Lydgate did not vote for him but Lydgate has found his conversation somewhat dispiriting. He thinks to himself that there is "a pitiable infirmity of will in Mr Farebrother." ⁹⁹

Lydgate unfortunately is not greater and circumstance is very strong against him. And the strongest factors in his downfall are his failure to acknowledge the force of circumstances and his ignorance as to his own nature and its susceptibilities. Indeed it is his very "confidence in his own powers and integrity much fortified by contempt for petty obstacles or seductions over which he had had no experience" ¹⁰⁰ that defeats him. That one sentence sums up his self-deception

and his failure to appreciate the "hard unaccommodating Actual." ¹⁰¹

But if he had had more self-awareness and a greater capacity for making a realistic appraisal of circumstances, would this have made him more free, less constrained, less certain of defeat? As we have seen, freedom to George Eliot equals "necessity understood." ¹⁰² Such understanding, if Lydgate had been able to achieve it, would have given as much freedom as we are granted in this causally determined universe.

George Eliot has been recognised as a Stoic in the doctrine of patient endurance which she advocates, but the similarities between her world view and that of stoicism go deeper than the adoption of an attitude of resignation towards the hardships of our lot. The self-instruction she records in a letter of 1868 expresses both the value of endurance and the importance of working within the existing framework of the laws of the universe. For here she insists that it is well "never to beat and bruise one's wings against the inevitable but to throw the whole force of one's soul towards the achievement of some possible better." ¹⁰³ This meliorist statement aligns George Eliot with other nineteenth-century reformers who believed that we could make some progress if we understood the laws and co-operated with them. However, her basic belief in "invariability of sequence" ¹⁰⁴ accords with the Stoic emphasis on natural laws. A. A. Long discusses the Stoic definition of the sage or the ideal good man as "one whose actions are consistently determined by a reasoning faculty which accords with the will of Nature or God. This makes him the only free man. Reason does not give the sage free will, in the sense that his actions are undetermined by character and environment. But it enables him to make what will happen part of his own will and plan." ¹⁰⁵ The similarity between this definition and the groundplan that has emerged from a study of Lydgate's freedom to choose is unmistakable. Freedom for the Stoics as for George Eliot is necessity

understood, not beating and bruising one's wings against the inevitable, but throwing all one's energies into achieving whatever it is possible to achieve, however slight. The consonance between Stoicism and George Eliot's thought patterns is interesting, showing as it does, how similar world views lead to similar responses. Within both systems it would appear that although some freedom is acknowledged, it is undeniably the scantest of freedoms, and consists less in the possibilities of action than in the cultivation of a state of mind.

In this section I have examined the question of freedom in connection with the one character, Lydgate, from the one novel, Middlemarch. I will now look briefly at a further aspect of George Eliot's concept of freedom in connection with Gwendolen Harleth from Daniel Deronda.

George Eliot expresses her delight in each day as providing an opportunity for exercising the will, for "willing to will strongly."¹⁰⁶ This, taken in isolation from the patterning of the novels, might suggest a Nietzschean glorification of the super-hero, the apotheosis of the will for its own sake. In these terms the history of a character like Gwendolen Harleth, whose "will was peremptory,"¹⁰⁷ would read as a tragedy in that she was unfortunate enough to marry a man whose will was stronger, and who took a sadistic delight in controlling her, effectively paralysing her will with his "torpedo"¹⁰⁸-like grip. But George Eliot would never have consented to so morally neutral an analysis of her work. Psychological criticism directed at Gwendolen's failure to master Grandcourt might well stress that the fault lay in her low self-esteem, which allowed her to suffer from uncertainty and self-doubt; it would make much of Gwendolen's barely hinted at frigidity as a determining factor in the failure of the marital relationship. This low self-esteem in George Eliot's terms, however, provides the entry for possible

moral regeneration; remorse as an agent of the conscience is a sign of potential moral strength, not of psychological insufficiency.

If, then, a morally neutral exercising of the will is not permitted, what is George Eliot saying in the early part of Daniel Deronda? We see Gwendolen's superb self-confidence that she will make a mark on the world suffer a series of shocks until in her final outpouring of her soul to Deronda after Grandcourt's drowning, we can scarcely recognise the self-contained, proud young lady of the opening scenes. The underlying commentary points constantly to the exaggerated and unrealistic quality of Gwendolen's expectations, both of herself and what she can achieve, and of the world. Grappling with the implications of their loss of fortune, she says pettishly to her mother: "It seems to me a very extraordinary world if people in our position must sink in this way all at once'....the other worlds with which she was conversant being constructed with a sense of fitness that arranged her own future agreeably." ¹⁰⁹ We encounter similar solipsistic beliefs in other egoists, for example, Arthur Donnithorne or Rosamond Vincy. George Eliot sums up such mistaken notions when she points out that "the most obstinate beliefs that mortals entertain about themselves are such as they have no evidence for beyond a constant pulsing of their self-satisfaction--as it were a hidden seed of madness, a confidence that they can move the world without precise notion of standing-place or lever." ¹¹⁰ The key words from this statement are "evidence" and "precise notion." For George Eliot, as we have seen, the world was governed by irreversible laws and freedom consisted in recognising these laws, co-operating with them where possible and not straining against those that were immutable. In these terms, Gwendolen's ignorance or partial ignorance that this is how things are makes meaningless her defiant claim that "she did not mean to submit, and let misfortune do what it would with her." ¹¹¹ It is inevitable that she should suffer

and fail to achieve mastery over "the unmanageable world" which, like Herr Klesmer, was "independent of her wishes--something vitriolic that would not cease to burn because you smiled or frowned at it." ¹¹²

If we are in doubt as to the attitude George Eliot wants us to adopt towards Gwendolen, or are tempted to feel that George Eliot treats her too harshly, we are provided with an explicit, and in her eyes, wholly admirable, exemplar in the person of Mirah Lapidoth for whose submission to fate, and piety, we are enjoined to feel unqualified approval. Mirah says, "'I set myself to obey and suffer: what else could I do?'" ¹¹³

There is a very explicit structural patterning in the contrast between these two women in Deronda's life: the exhibitionism of the one is set against the lack of self-consciousness in performance of the other: one rejects all claims of duty, even the teaching of the superfluous and inconvenient sisters, while the other sadly accepts the duty of caring for the derelict father: and most noticeably, one is defiant and unwilling to submit to the dictates of fate while the other is all patient endurance. Gwendolen's kicking against the pricks is shown to be futile and is based on her ignorance of circumstances. Our final view of her is of one chastened and reduced, anxiously mouthing Deronda's words that she may "live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born." ¹¹⁴ Mirah's stoicism and resignation of her own claims are rewarded and she marries Deronda.

This brief discussion of Gwendolen Harleth, and the longer analysis of Lydgate confirm George Eliot's underlying belief in freedom as I have outlined it in the first section of this chapter. Both Gwendolen and Lydgate illustrate the waste of potential that occurs when people are ignorant of where their limits lie, when they fail to accept how much they are circumscribed by their situation. They suffer for their failure to acknowledge the force of necessity and for their refusal to

recognise that their only safeguard against such necessity is "evidence" and "precise notions,"¹¹⁵ and the directing of their energies and the strength of their will towards achieving "some possible better."¹¹⁶

The tension between a belief in "universal causality"¹¹⁷ and a belief in the capacity of the individual to exercise his will underpins all George Eliot's thought. The Positivistic faith in irreversible laws, while conferring the possibility of scientific progress, also bordered on a totally mechanistic description of the world and of human possibility. Yet some measure of freedom of choice had to be maintained if an individual was to be held responsible for his actions. There is an important difference between moral progress which is determined and inevitable, and moral progress which occurs as a result of an individual's making genuine moral choices and learning from his successes and failures.

George Eliot's solution to the problem of how a character can have any free will at all in a world dominated by "invariability of sequence"¹¹⁸ is two-fold. Some laws are inexorably binding and unmodifiable and towards those we can only adopt an attitude of patient stoicism. But others, especially those which involve social or moral organisation, are less rigid, in that a knowledge of them, at least enables us to co-operate with them to achieve beneficent results. We cannot make any impression on the law of gravity but we can recognise the learning processes outlined by the association psychologists, avoid certain tendencies and reinforce others in order to effect desired change. This solution is summed up in the phrase "freedom is necessity understood."¹¹⁹ The other solution offered is Lewes' emergent evolutionary belief, where the immense complexity of the factors in any given operation makes accurate prediction impossible and thus confers a certain flexibility. It is not that certain causes will not produce certain effects; it is that we can never be entirely sure of

all the causes operating at any one time. Thus, when we come to the intricacies of human relationships, we have a less rigid groundplan and greater scope for moral development than would be the case in a totally mechanistic universe.

But, to analyse George Eliot's ideas in relation to the general ideas of her period is to run the risk of suggesting that her novels are philosophic or moral treatises and to give weight to the adverse opinion expressed by one critic who felt that her books had been dictated to her by the "ghost of David Hume."¹²⁰ An analysis of her ideas provides an account of the "philosophic equilibrium" she achieved, but there still remains the problem of a "practical equilibrium"¹²¹ in terms of plot development, characterisation and narrative technique. Later, I will focus more closely on the actual novels in order to discuss what happens to these ideas when they become part of the story of a Maggie Tulliver, a Romola, or a Dorothea Brooke. For the moment, however, I am concentrating on the "philosophic equilibrium," isolating certain recurring ideas and clusters of ideas from her novels and relating these to the ideological background of the mid-nineteenth century.

Psychological Assumptions.

A knowledge of the psychological assumptions entertained in the nineteenth-century enables us to pinpoint the co-ordinates within which George Eliot presents her characters. But those assumptions do not constitute one fixed and delimited set of beliefs. Nineteenth century psychology only gradually emerged from its dependence on philosophy. As it incorporated research findings from the fields of biology, neurophysiology, and sociology it became a science in its own right. The school of association psychology which developed from Locke's chapter on "The Association of Ideas" emphasised the way in which frequent or vivid impressions coalesce in the mind and predispose our thinking and reacting in certain definable ways. Research into the functioning of the brain was, at this time, in its infancy, and attempts to relate ideas to actual neural circuits led to what R. S. Peters sees as a persistent confusion in nineteenth century empirical thought, a confusion between "philosophic questions about the meaning of ideas and about the grounds of knowledge" and "questions in genetic psychology about their origin."¹ Alexander Bain is an important figure in the development of psychology in that his concern with action led to a more dynamic approach to psychological problems and opened up the way to a study of behaviour.

The publication of The Origin of Species in 1859, and the sociological writings of such men as Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer reinforced the increasing importance given to environment or the "medium" in which an organism lived. Both evolutionary biology and sociology recognised the interdependence of one creature with another and the complexity of their inter-relationships. It was acknowledged that no

creature can exist in isolation. The realisation that there was constant competition for territory and food led to the coining of the phrase "survival of the fittest."

The merging of these basic concepts, the formation of habitual patterns of response and the importance of environment in determining experience, produced an evolutionary psychology which claimed that ancestral patterns were laid down in the nervous system and accordingly could be transmitted from one generation to the next. We are thus born with fixed tendencies which dispose us to act in certain ways. On the surface this may seem to be a return to a belief in the theory of innate ideas but writers such as Lewes and Spencer stressed the experiential origin of these inherited tendencies. The learning theories of the association psychology still apply; they have just been set further back in time so that it is not we ourselves but our ancestors, whether animal or human, remote or proximate, who have learnt responses to situations, and passed them on.

If we turn to George Eliot's novels, we can see very clearly that she was familiar with these different psychological developments. Association psychology provides the theory of psychological determinism and governs George Eliot's conception of how to delineate systematically a character's moral growth or decline. The emphasis on environment, or "medium," becomes increasingly important in the novels. Middlemarch, for instance, with its sub-title, A Study of Provincial Life, can be regarded as a sociological document. The tenets of evolutionary psychology appear in two ^{other} late works, The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda.

The next three sections offer more substantial evidence of the relationship between the mid-century psychological assumptions and the novels of George Eliot.

Psychological Determinism.

"Constructs" for the comprehension of the world are more "satisfactory" if they are "characterised not by straight-line cause-effect thinking but by ecological thinking." ¹ This statement occurs in an article, "Darwinism and Darwinisticism" in which Morse Peckham discusses how nineteenth-century intellectuals assimilated the revolutionary ideas contained in Darwin's The Origin of Species. Obviously, he is not talking specifically about George Eliot's novels, but his remark becomes especially interesting when set alongside one made by a George Eliot critic, J. Hillis Miller. He outlines the correspondence George Eliot saw between "small- and large-scale structures" which he claims is a contributory factor in her "rejection of that straightforward idea of single causes which had characterised, for example, Adam Bede. In Middlemarch," he continues, "Eliot still believes in causality, but in the psychological and social realms the causes are now seen as unimaginably multiple." ²

I now propose to discuss the shift of emphasis detected by J. Hillis Miller and other critics in the light of the possibilities suggested by Morse Peckham. I will, therefore, endeavour to show that the progressive awareness of complexity and interconnectedness apparent in the later novels, in comparison with the more clear-cut, even simplistic causal relationships traceable in the earlier novels, has a parallel in the development of psychological theory in the nineteenth century. The later George Eliot does not reject outright the simple causation of the earlier novels; the treatment of Bulstrode, for example, offers many similarities to the treatment of Tito Melema. It is just that she

incorporates this simple causation in a wider frame of psychological and social presentation. It is not a case of either/or, but of her widening her base to include more factors. The simple causality so apparent in characters like Arthur Donnithorne, Tito Melema, and even, in some respects, Maggie Tulliver, is not totally discarded when she begins to concentrate more rigorously on "medium" and a character's relationship with the whole complexity of his environment. In the same way, the association psychology which developed out of the epistemological enquiries of Locke and his followers was not discarded by Spencer, Lewes, and other evolutionary psychologists of the mid-nineteenth century; in fact it provided a necessary foundation on which they could erect the new psychology. The relationship between them is that between a two-dimensional square and a three-dimensional cube, not that between two totally unrelated geometric shapes.

It is necessary to make clear from the outset that I am not attempting to prove direct influence. I am not stating that George Eliot perused the learning theories of Locke, Hartley, the Mills, Spencer, and others, consciously seeking out a basis for her characterisation in the novels. I am, however, suggesting that we can learn a great deal about the terms in which she presents her characters to us, the manner in which they confront the problems that assail them, if we examine the basic psychological assumptions of her time. George Eliot is constantly preoccupied with moral development. She would wholeheartedly have concurred with Donald Mackay's statement that what is important is not that we are free to choose but to change.³ And her belief in irreversible laws gave her an assurance that change was possible, even if, as I have suggested, it were a very limited change. The following statement from her review of Mackay confirms this possibility when she writes with reference to the "invariability of sequence", that it is

"this alone which can give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible." ⁴

In terms of human response, this "invariability of sequence" relates to the formation of habits, and to the difficulties we have, both in acquiring them and ridding ourselves of them, if they prove undesirable or counter-productive. When we come to examine the novels we see that George Eliot's references to habit fall into two categories depending on whether the habit belongs to one of the minor characters or whether it relates to a protagonist. Sometimes it is just a passing phrase as in the following reference to Jack Lingon in Felix Holt as a "man of sixty ...with a mind and with habits dried hard by the years." ⁵ At other times, it is a technique for presenting character growth or decline by means of her belief in the theory of psychological determinism. Both kinds, however, show a definite connection with the learning theories of the school of association psychology. I will briefly outline the background and development of this school before discussing how George Eliot incorporated its principles into her novels.

The law of the association of ideas was originally formulated by Locke as an epistemological corollary to his sensationalism. Rejecting the theory of innate ideas, Locke claims that the mind is a passive receptor of sense impressions; "the senses," he says, "at first let in particular ideas and furnish the yet empty cabinet." ⁶ This is the same basic assumption that causes George Eliot to write in The Mill on the Floss about "that familiar hearth, where the pattern of the rug and the grate and the fire-irons were 'first ideas' that it was no more possible to criticise than the solidity and extension of matter." ⁷ In Locke's schema, what is important is that the mind, the tabula rasa, is passive, storing inputs from the sensory world but not itself structuring experience or inventing ideas. He says that "it is not in the power of the

most exalted wit or enlarged understanding, by any quickness or variety of thought, to invent or frame one new simple idea in the mind." ⁸

We see evidence of George Eliot's acceptance of some form of sensation-
alism in her treatment of two different characters who, because of
physical or mental hardship, have been reduced to a state of childish-
ness; both of them need to orient themselves firmly in the physical
world in order to re-establish for themselves any sense of identity.
Mr Tulliver, after his stroke, and Baldassarre, after his long penance
in slavery, are confused and incoherent. When Mr Tulliver is recovering,
he has difficulty, at first, in re-establishing the co-ordinates of his
world, and George Eliot indicates that sense impressions in this in-
stance are a stronger source of knowledge than that provided by words.
It is better for him to be brought downstairs and to actually see that
the bailiff has removed all the furniture than to be told about it. We
read that "the full sense of the present could only be imparted gradual-
ly by new experience--not by mere words, which must remain weaker than
the impressions left by the old experience." ⁹ And shortly afterwards,
George Eliot comments of Mr Tulliver that "his faculties seemed to be
renewing their strength from getting a footing on this demonstration
of the senses." ¹⁰ This is similar to the description of the pathetic
and broken Baldassarre in Romola, whose "power of imagining facts," we
are told, "needed to be reinforced continually by the senses." ¹¹ Later
we learn that it was as if "he needed the sensation to keep alive his
ideas." ¹²

The same stress on the importance of sensory input as a means where-
by we maintain stability occurs in Felix Holt after Mr Lyon is shattered
by the possibility that Christian is Esther's father. We read that "he
was so afraid lest his emotion should deprive him of the presence of
mind necessary to the due attention to particulars in the coming inter-

view, that he continued to occupy his sight and touch with the objects which had stirred the depths not only of memory, but of dread." ¹³ These various examples leave us in no doubt as to the importance George Eliot attributed to the power of sense data to build up lasting impressions in our minds. They are drawn from people who are in some state of physical and emotional extremity, all of whom have regressed to an earlier stage in the learning process and illustrate Herbert Spencer's remark that if, as he believed, "the fundamental condition of vitality, is that the internal order shall be continually adjusted to the external order," then, "necessarily...the order of the states of consciousness is in correspondence with the order of phenomena in the environment." ¹⁴

If, as Locke believed, the mind was passive during the learning process, this provides an explanation for men's individual differences. These can be attributed to experience and therefore ultimately to the environment. In his chapter on "The Association of Ideas", he says that "this strong combination of ideas ...the mind makes in itself either voluntarily or by chance; and hence it comes in different men to be very different, according to their different inclinations, education, interests, etc." ¹⁵ That George Eliot recognises this individual differentiation given by experience, we see from an early description of Deronda. The suspicion that he is illegitimate, "the sense of an entailed disadvantage--the deformed foot doubtfully hidden by the shoe," ¹⁶ is an experience of suffering which greatly contributes to his moral growth. "Deronda's early-wakened susceptibility, charged at first with ready indignation and resistant pride, had raised in him a premature reflection on certain questions of life; it had given a bias to his conscience, a sympathy with certain ills, and a tension of resolve in certain directions, which marked him off from other youths much more than any talents he possessed." ¹⁷

Another major thinker to work at the theory of association was David Hartley who added Newton's doctrine of vibrations to Locke's theory to produce a psychophysical parallelism, postulating that "sensations were paralleled by vibrations ... of 'elemental' particles in the nerves and brain." The genesis of ideas is attributed to the fact that "sensations, by being oft repeated, leave certain vestiges, types or images of themselves." ¹⁸ The Utilitarians, Gay and the Mills, gratefully added to the laws of association the further notion of the significance of pleasure and pain, or to borrow an analogue from the law of gravitation, attraction and repulsion. They postulated that we seek out what gives us pleasure and shy away from what gives us pain and that if frequency and vividness are sufficient explanations of how associations build up in the mind, then pleasure and pain are obvious concomitants. This reveals a shift of emphasis from that of passive learning to that of motivated action. The most important thinker in this connection was Alexander Bain. He was also important as a pioneer of biological psychology and was engaged in active research. R. M. Young says that he "did more than any other single figure to free psychology from its philosophic context and make it a natural science in its own right." ¹⁹ Bain examined all motor phenomena, beginning with contractility and sensibility, and related all forms of spontaneous instinctive activity to their accompanying feelings.

At this point the history of association psychology became involved with the evolutionary theories of the mid-nineteenth century, firstly with Spencer's "metaphysical" ²⁰ account of evolution and then with those of Darwin himself. "Thus," as H. C. Warren points out in his History of the Association Psychology, "the meaning of repetition of associations is broadened, and the law of frequency or habit acquires a phylogenetic as well as an ontogenetic interpretation." ²¹ I propose to

examine the evolutionary psychology in my next chapters.

The discussion so far has indicated that the law of association offers an explanation of the process of acquiring habits. These habits are associative patterns of response, learned reactions to the world of experience which coalesce in the mind as a result of frequency and/or vividness. George Eliot uses the actual word "habit" frequently, as in the following description of Romola. "It had become so thoroughly her habit to reject her impulsive choice, and to obey passively the guidance of outward claims."²² Or we have this comment from Janet's Repentance that "our habitual life is like a wall hung with pictures, which has been shone on by the suns of many years: take one of the pictures away, and it leaves a definite blank space, to which our eyes can never turn without a sensation of discomfort."²³ In addition, George Eliot makes reference to the possibility that habit becomes a fixed response of the physical organism, like the movement of a muscle or some other faculty. Deronda's admonition to Gwendolen about using her fear as a safeguard enjoins her to use this meditative exercise in the same way that she uses her sight or her sense of hearing. The ease with which Tito utters the lies about his father, claiming him as a deranged, vindictive servant, is likewise described with a physical analogue. "The lie was not so difficult when it was once begun ...and gave him a sense of power such as men feel when they have begun a muscular feat successfully."²⁴

Another way in which George Eliot refers to habit-formation and its effects on the personality is by means of various images, mainly those drawn from water, for example, "channels," "rills," "resistance"; or from plants, especially the word "fibre." The implication in both cases is that habit and the effect of habit spread out through the whole system. The following description in Felix Holt illustrates the possible choking, stifling effect of habit. Jermyrn has contracted "small rigid habits of

thinking and acting" ²⁵ so that he has become one of "those who are led on through the years by gradual demands of a selfishness which has spread its fibres far and wide through the intricate vanities and sordid cares of an everyday existence." ²⁶ The presence of the word "selfishness" in this description underlines very forcibly the fact that while George Eliot was concerned with how we learn, her major preoccupation lay with how we learn moral responses, with how we can exploit these laws of "invariability of sequence" ²⁷ in order to safeguard ourselves against moral chaos. Accordingly, in the novels, we have various characters who manifest different degrees of moral awareness and there is frequently a correlation between rigid habit formation in the characters and an inflexible, unsympathetic response to other human beings. Some of the characters are shown us in the process of acquiring these habitual responses, others we encounter at a stage in their lives where these responses have already become "set." And these habitual responses influence judgement, creating prejudice and false assumptions, as much as they influence overt behaviour.

Tom Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss provides a useful illustration of this; his action in condemning Maggie outright on her chastened return from Mudport is shown as totally in keeping with his habitual severity, "a severity," as George Eliot tells us, "strongly marked by [these] positive and negative qualities ...strength of will, conscious rectitude of purpose, narrowness of imagination and intellect, great power of self-control, and a disposition to exert control over others." ²⁸ To such people, she explains, "prejudices come as the natural food of tendencies which can get no sustenance out of that complex, fragmentary, doubt-provoking knowledge which we call truth." ²⁹ Tom is certain that he is right and he has never seen any necessity to question that certainty. He believes what he sees and has no inkling that he is biased in his

seeing, or that he is looking in the world for confirmation of what he already believes to be there. Accordingly, in his reactions to Maggie, he "judged by what he had been able to see; and the judgement was painful enough to himself. He thought he had the demonstration of facts observed through years by his own eyes which gave no warning of their imperfections." ³⁰ This is the mature Tom, but we could say of him what George Eliot says of Harold Transome that "the man was no more than the boy writ large, with an extensive commentary." ³¹ The younger Tom had been described as a "boy who adhered tenaciously to impressions once received: as with all minds in which mere perception predominates over thought and emotion, the external remained to him rigidly what it was in the first instance," ³² a boy, we are told, "born with a deficient power of apprehending signs and abstractions ...a congenital deficiency." ³³ He is one of those few characters whom George Eliot describes as "inexorable, unbending, unmodifiable." ³⁴

This brief account of Tom Tulliver indicates two aspects of George Eliot's belief in the potency of habit formation: the fact that it produces rigid, non-adaptive behaviour and that it applies to the realm of ideas as well as to the world of action. A passage in Lewes' The Physiology of Common Life (1859-60) draws all these strands together. In it he equates habit, fixed ideas and automatic actions, offers the fact of repetition as an explanation for their potency, and uses the word "channel" to describe how they come to be established in the neurological circuit. Lewes maintains that

Habits, Fixed Ideas, and what are called Automatic Actions, all depend on the tendency which a sensation has to discharge itself through the readiest channel. In learning to speak a new language, to play on a musical instrument, or to perform any unaccustomed movements, great difficulty is felt, because the channels through which each sensation has to pass have not become established; but no sooner has frequent repetition cut a pathway, than this difficulty vanishes. ³⁵

The similarity between this passage and the following account of Tito Melema is unmistakable. We learn that "in this first distinct colloquy with himself the ideas which had previously been scattered and interrupted had now concentrated themselves; the little rills of selfishness had united and made a channel, so that they could never again meet with the same resistance." ³⁶ Tito's selfishness has become fixed and established as a habit, an automatic action, and the suggestion, even, is that this has caused there to be laid down in his nervous system neurological circuits which become permanent and irreducible.

The laws of association psychology describe the learning process and tell how we come to acquire habits; they also suggest the inevitable corollary that habits once established in this way become enormously difficult to eradicate. Maggie Tulliver, returning in a tired and depressed state from a spell of schoolteaching, compares her state of mind to that of a bear continuously pacing out the same confines. She says to Lucy, "It is with me as I used to think it would be with the poor uneasy white bear I saw at the show. I thought he must have got so stupid with the habit of turning backwards and forwards in that narrow space, that he would keep doing it if they set him free. One gets a bad habit of being unhappy." ³⁷

A habit of unhappiness obviously constitutes a bad habit; if there are laws which state categorically how such habits are formed, obviously they can be used in the formation of good and valuable habits; the problem becomes one of determining how to eliminate such entrenched habits as the one Maggie has just described. As Spencer in The Principles of Psychology (1855) declares, "where a certain relation has been daily experienced throughout our whole lives, with scarcely an exception, it becomes extremely difficult for us to conceive it as otherwise--to break the connection between the states of consciousness representing it...." ³⁸

It is this very rigidity of habit formation that is cause for concern, and suggests the sort of limitation that J. S. Mill expresses so sadly when he says that

the doctrine of what is called Philosophical Necessity weighed on my existence like an incubus. I felt as if I was scientifically proved to be the helpless slave of antecedent circumstances; as if my character and that of all others had been formed for us by agencies beyond our control, and was wholly out of our own power. I often said to myself, what a relief it would be if I could disbelieve the doctrine of the formation of character by circumstances....it would be a blessing if the doctrine of necessity could be believed by all quoad the characters of others and disbelieved in regard to their own. ³⁹

However, Mill's buoyancy returned and George Eliot's earlier novels could almost be said to be exploring the implications of the statement in The System of Logic, that "we are exactly as capable of making our own character, if we will, as others are of making it for us," ⁴⁰ a remark which contains the same resonance as George Eliot's comment to Mrs Ponsonby about the need to "will strongly." ⁴¹

Two characters from the early novels who clearly illustrate this capability of making their own characters, however unwittingly, are Arthur Donnithorne in Adam Bede, and Tito Melema in Romola. The technique which George Eliot adopts for setting these characters before us, is to present them with various moral choices; whether to see Hetty again, whether to deny Baldassarre's claims, and so on. We are shown the characters grappling with their own conscious and unconscious desires, their unstable resolutions, their self-deceits and rationalisations. All the time the authorial commentary is hammering home to us the inescapable fact that "our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds." ⁴² The point George Eliot is making so forcibly is that we cannot escape the psychological pressure of our choices. Although we may escape the physical consequences, George Eliot does not allow this to happen to her characters, thus laying herself open to charges of dealing out a simple retributive justice or a "poetic justice" sadly out of keeping in such

realistic novels.⁴³ But what we cannot escape is our necessity, whether we choose well or badly, to readjust our inner balance after each new choice. George Eliot describes this authorially in an image with a suggestion of political insurgency and pragmatism.

There is a terrible coercion in our deeds which may first turn the honest man into a deceiver, and then reconcile him to the change; for this reason-- that the second wrong presents itself to him in the guise of the only practicable right. The action which before commission has been seen with that blended common-sense and fresh untarnished feeling which is the healthy eye of the soul, is looked at afterwards with the lens of apologetic ingenuity, through which all things that men call beautiful and ugly are seen to be made up of textures very much alike. Europe adjusts itself to a fait accompli, and so does an individual character....⁴⁴

This provides an explanation for and a summing up of the necessity Arthur now sees himself under to deceive Adam as to his true relations with Hetty. Each step which has brought him to this act of deception has been clearly outlined; each new manoeuvre, each separate stage of rationalisation has been placed before us so that we are in no doubt that Arthur is responsible for his own situation, that his action is rooted in his own careless self-regarding view of the world, in his discounting of consequences, or in his easy dismissal of them with a belief that he can compensate for any unhappiness he has "unwittingly" caused by gifts of money or preferment. He even has his own private Providence. "Arthur told himself, he did not deserve that things should turn out badly-- he had never meant beforehand to do anything his conscience disapproved-- he had been led on by circumstances. There was a sort of implicit confidence in him that he was really such a good fellow at bottom, Providence would not treat him harshly."⁴⁵

We have, in effect, watched Arthur "making his own character." He has set in motion a train of events which then inexorably impells him and the people whose lives he has affected. There is no turning back; at any point the choice is between further deceptions, further shaky resol-

utions, further "vitiation" adjustments and confession, openness and a willing acceptance of consequences. This he scarcely considers. Arthur comes finally and sadly to a realisation that Adam had been speaking truly when he had said earlier in the book, "'There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for.'" ⁴⁶ He has learnt that he cannot escape from the consequences of his deeds, even if we may feel that it is because those deeds have had significant reverberations in the outside world that he is so conveniently chastened.

If Arthur seems rigid and two-dimensional and schematic, then Tito Melema, for all that he is involved in a greater variety of activities, is even more so. The various activities, after all, are just different facets of betrayal; he abandons his father, deceives both Romola and Tessa, sells Bardi's library and becomes a political intriguer and spy; these are what George Eliot calls "the successive falsities of his life." ⁴⁷ But fundamentally he remains the same character, easy-going, hedonistic, morally "supple." In this novel, Romola, as in Adam Bede, we have constant authorial commentary reinforcing the conclusions we have already drawn from Tito's words and deeds, and from his inner "colloquies." And these emphasise constantly the fact that Tito is laying down habits, neurological channels even, which determine each successive choice. This is made very clear in the following passage which I will quote again, concerning Tito's first debate with himself about what he should do with the money from his rings, whether he should seek out his father or stay comfortably in Florence. "In this first distinct colloquy with himself the ideas which had previously been scattered and interrupted had now concentrated themselves; the little rills of selfishness had united and made a channel, so that they could never again meet with the same resistance." ⁴⁸ The undercurrent of authorial comment reveals to us that once this has happened, it continues to happen, until he is totally en-

gulfed by an "undying habit of fear." ⁴⁹ At the very end of the book when he might still have been able to get safely out of Florence, he is able to escape his physical pursuers but not the mental furies which make him excessively anxious. He has opportunely diverted his pursuers' attention from himself by throwing away his purse, has dived into the Arno and swum a reasonable distance but his certainty that he is still being pursued causes him to swim longer than is necessary, to over-tire himself and eventually to come ashore into the waiting stranglehold of his vengeful father. A major irony of the book lies in the fact that we see Tito confidently assuming that he is in control of events, weighing possibilities and choosing accordingly, feeling successful in the measure to which he manages to escape physical danger or public opprobrium, while all the time the real danger lies within, in "the contaminating effect of deeds." ⁵⁰ His illusion of freedom is supreme; we see, however, all too clearly, that he is totally bound, that far from confronting possibilities flexibly and creatively, he is treading a narrowing and more circumscribed path.

If we concede that George Eliot's belief in the theory of psychological determinism provides her with a set of assumptions for effectively representing a character whose successive choices morally debase him, what do we make of the reverse situation, where a character's choices are positive and morally superior? Does such a system work as adequately in the case of Maggie Tulliver? I am merely posing this question here as I will deal with it in detail later when I discuss the implications of George Eliot's intellectual system, but I wanted to draw attention at this stage to the fact that Maggie's moral growth is presented to us in a similar way to the moral regressions of Arthur and Tito.

In this chapter, I have been tracing some aspects of George Eliot's

acceptance of the theory of psychological determinism, and of the way in which she shows a character's establishing set patterns of response to the situations which confront him. As she says in Romola, "our lives make a moral tradition for our individual selves, as the life of mankind at large makes a moral tradition for the race." ⁵¹ The laws furnished by the learning theories of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century philosophers, taken over and incorporated into neurophysiological and biological researches, all reinforced her belief in the strictness of causal sequences. Habit formation becomes almost irreversible and it therefore becomes supremely important to ensure that the habits which are acquired are those that increase a sense of fellowship, of sympathy towards others, those, in short, that, in George Eliot's terms, promote moral growth. And the acquisition of right habits is especially important in that our supposedly impulsive actions are decisively determined by the sorts of moral choices, the sorts of habitual responses we have made in the past. When Tito disowns his father on the steps of the Duomo, and is himself bewildered at how spontaneously the denunciation has risen to his lips, recognising that he would have saved himself a great deal of trouble if he had lovingly acknowledged the old man, the authorial comment reminds us that "Tito was experiencing that inexorable law of human souls, that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil which gradually determines character." ⁵²

These early novels, then, highlight exactly this law; the character with his inner battles, is foregrounded and, to a degree, isolated from his surroundings. The pastoral community of Adam Bede and the less well-realised Renaissance Florence of Romola are backgrounds against which the characters live out their lives; there is none of that uncertainty between figure and ground which Martin Price describes as a feature of a realistic novel like Middlemarch, ⁵³ where we cannot

be exactly certain whether the community is there to provide a medium against which or within which Lydgate realises himself, or whether the story of Lydgate is to be seen as one demonstrating aspects of community inter-relationships. Certainly the technique George Eliot uses in Middlemarch is not an entirely new departure; it obviously offers an extension of the technique she uses in The Mill on the Floss, where Maggie's struggles are shown in part as a response to her unaccepting and unacceptable environment. St Ogg's and the alarming array of aunts and uncles become, as it were, a force, almost one could say, an additional character with a pulsating organic life of its own. And of Romola she wrote to R. H. Hutton that "it is the habit of my imagination to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself."⁵⁴ But there is a difference between a well-realised medium which provides a background against which a character is tested, and a medium shown to exert great pressure on that character so that we are constantly aware of the process of interaction between the two. There is a difference of perspective; in the early novels we trace the systematic moral deterioration of Arthur or Tito and although their actions, their moral choices and decisions have an effect on their respective communities, and although we do see the ramifications of these actions, moral choices and decisions, the focus is on the characters and the chronologically presented account of their degeneration. This gives a linear development, what Morse Peckham calls a "straight-line cause-effect construct;"⁵⁵ the shift of emphasis that occurs when we have our attention drawn to the positive and negative interactions between a character and the society in which he lives, on an analogy with the necessary interaction between an organism and its medium, offers, in Peckham's terms, "an ecological construct."⁵⁶

In the same way, the presentation of the characters of Arthur and

Tito shows us them faced with major moral choices, and there is very little offered of the texture of their daily lives, apart from such crucial moments. I maintain, therefore, that these early novels show the characters confronting "explicit moral choices" but do not give adequately the texture of their lives in a "small piecemeal" ⁵⁷ way and this is itself mainly due to the linear set-piece method of characterisation I have been describing.

The laws of association, the rigid sequence of cause and effect provide a very mechanistic model for the presentation of character; the later organicist model of interaction provides a more flexible base for depicting character growth and change. Morse Peckham speaks pertinently about the "revolution in the European mind against thinking in terms of static mechanism and the redirection of the mind to thinking in terms of dynamic organicism." ⁵⁸ I have shown George Eliot defining her characters in a way that accords with this "static mechanism" and I will now discuss how she ~~redirects~~ her mind towards "dynamic organicism" by incorporating the assumptions of evolutionary psychology into the framework of her later works.

The External Conditions of Existence.

In chapter 11 of Middlemarch, George Eliot writes that "anyone watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another, which tells like a calculated irony on the indifference or the frozen stare with which we look at our unintroduced neighbour."¹ This authorial comment provides a useful introduction to a discussion of a shift of emphasis in George Eliot's thought. The previous chapter examined the correlation between her psychological determinism, her stress on habit formation and the learning theories of the association psychologists. This chapter will examine the correlation between George Eliot's belief in "the stealthy convergence of human lots" and the nineteenth century sociological, biological, and ultimately, psychological interest in environment. The previous chapter also drew attention to the moralistic slant George Eliot gave to the question of habit formation. She felt that habits which reinforced selfishness were dangerous, and therefore emphasised the need to establish habitual responses which could serve the interests of the community. Her increasing interest in, and concern with the interconnectedness of human lives also take on a moralistic bias. Characters in the early novels can be indicted by their creator for their failure to know themselves; characters in later novels, while still guilty on this count, can also be criticised for not adequately recognising the nature of the forces confronting them. Such characters as Lydgate, as I have already shown, fail to make a realistic assessment of their circumstances, circumstances which now include not only themselves and their own potential for good and evil, but a whole range of environmental factors as well.

While we examine the psychological theories of the mid-nineteenth century in order to further our understanding of George Eliot's novels, we must never lose sight of the fact that she converted these theories and their assumptions about human nature into the moral parameters within which her characters live out their lives. A character may be shown to us enmeshed in a complex environment; that is one shaping factor. But his failure to concede this is regarded as evidence of his solipsistic, morally ignorant stance; and this is another shaping factor. The quotation from Middlemarch introducing this chapter contains both of these: "the slow preparation of effects" on the one hand, and the "calculated irony" of our indifference to these effects on the other.

I have just described a character as "enmeshed in a complex environment." I chose the phrase advisedly as web images and images of tangled threads, of spinning and weaving are recurring motifs especially in the later novels. They provide extended analogues for a character's relationship with his fellows, with the "conditions" and "circumstances" of his life. One of the first occurrences of this kind of imagery is in The Mill on the Floss. It is used as a possible explanation of why it is that Mr Tulliver for all his tendency to prompt action is still constantly left with the feeling that the world is "puzzling." "I have observed," comments the narrator, "that for getting a strong impression that a skein is tangled, there is nothing like snatching hastily at a single thread."² The image of a tangled thread is used again in Romola to describe the heroine's increasingly alienated vision of human possibilities. We are told that "the vision of any great purpose, any end of existence which could ennoble endurance and exalt the common deeds of a dusty life with divine ardours, was utterly eclipsed for her now by the sense of a confusion in human things which made all effort a mere dragging at tangled threads."³

Web images are a major patterning device in Middlemarch. Lydgate's failure to connect different experiences or to apply the same stringent rules of observation and evidence to his emotional life as he does to his scientific researches is described as an image of a web that has not been constructed. The various strands are still separate. "Has it not ceased to be remarkable--is it not rather what we expect in men," the narrator asks us, "that they should have numerous strands of experience lying side by side and never compare them with each other?"⁴ Rosemond and Lydgate during their engagement are described as industriously spinning away at the web that binds them together. This is a salutary reminder that we are responsible for our own bondage and cannot dismiss our responsibility with pleas of ignorance or cries that circumstances have been too much for us, as Mr Tulliver, for example, or even Mr Farebrother try to do.

Besides the web imagery which refers specifically to particular characters or particular situations, there are in Middlemarch other examples of such images which refer to George Eliot's attitude towards the process of writing a novel. These refer to her own sense of the complex material in front of her, to the problems of selection and control if that material is going to present to us the required pattern. She claims apologetically,

"I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe."⁵ She is too modest. Many critics have examined the rich historical and literary allusiveness of her novels and especially of Middlemarch.⁶ Mr Casaubon, for example, apart from bearing the name of an erudite contemporary of William Shakespeare, is compared variously with Locke, Milton, and Aquinas. However, these references to scholarly gentlemen are subtly

introduced into the novel and do not detract from her main preoccupation, the treatment of individual lots. George Eliot picks up the same web image as an analogue to the novel in the Finale when she warns us that "the fragment of a life, however typical, is not the sample of an even web." ⁷

If George Eliot has the sense that, in writing a novel, she is unravelling a complex web, we will scarcely be surprised to discover that her method of presenting character shows a similar awareness of complexity. As early as The Mill on the Floss, which, as I have indicated, provides us with the first example of her "ecological" ⁸ or "organicist" ⁹ approach to character, George Eliot dismisses the notion that our fate is dependent only on our character. "You have known Maggie a long while," she tells us, "and need to be told, not her characteristics, but her history, which is a thing hardly to be predicted even from the completest knowledge of her characteristics. For the tragedy of our lives is not created entirely from within. 'Character,' says Novalis, in one of his questionable aphorisms, 'character is destiny.' But not the whole of our destiny." ¹⁰ And to emphasise this point more fully George Eliot provides us with a different set of circumstances for the play Hamlet and a different possible ending.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, was speculative and irresolute, and we have a great tragedy in consequence. But if his father had lived to a good old age, and his uncle had died an early death, we can conceive Hamlet's having married Ophelia, and got through life with a reputation of sanity, notwithstanding many soliloquies, and some moody sarcasms towards the fair daughter of Polonius, to say nothing of the frankest incivility to his father-in-law. ¹¹

Different circumstances produce different effects and no-one can entirely escape from the pressure of external conditions. In the concluding section of Middlemarch, George Eliot says of Dorothea that "there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it." ¹² Dorothea, she suggests,

may have had the potential greatness of soul to become a St. Theresa but the social conditions into which she was born did not provide the necessary ethos. "For these later-born Theresas," so it seems, "were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul." ¹³

The same belief in the interaction between the inner and the outer is thematically important in Felix Holt. The individual struggles and problems of the protagonists are presented against the background of the political conflicts of Treby Magna. George Eliot is explicit in her comment that "these social changes in Treby parish are comparatively public matters, and this history is chiefly concerned with the private lot of a few men and women; but there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life." ¹⁴

This preliminary account of how George Eliot saw the relation between a character and the totality of his environment reveals her awareness of the complexity of this relation and the uncertainty involved in any attempt at prediction. The epigraph to chapter 4 of Middlemarch points to environmental influence on human personality while retaining a belief in psychological determinism.

1st Gent: "Our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves."

2nd Gent: "Ay, truly: but I think it is the world
That brings the iron." ¹⁵

This epigraph provides a useful starting-point for a discussion of nineteenth century assumptions. In The Study of Psychology, Lewes, discussing the "social medium" declares that

The organism adjusts itself to the external medium; it creates, and is in turn modified by, the social medium, for Society is the product of human feelings, and its existence is pari passu developed with the feelings which in turn it modifies and enlarges at each stage. Obviously, then, our science must seek its data not only in Biology but in Sociology. ¹⁶

In the mid-nineteenth century, sociologists like Comte and Spencer, and

biologists like Darwin and Lewes contributed equally to the developing Psychology. Both schools of thought emphasised the importance of "medium" and the crucial interdependence of an organism with its environment. "Medium" became a key assumption. Let us now briefly examine this assumption before turning to a closer examination of George Eliot's novels and of the ways in which she incorporated this assumption into her work.

Comte and Spencer both occupied themselves with biological as well as with sociological questions. Each of them at different times has been described as the father of modern sociology. They are both what A. N. Whitehead called "Systems Philosophers" ¹⁷ because they tried to incorporate all human knowledge within one general, over-riding principle. In Comte's case it was his descriptive and progressive law of the three states; in the case of Spencer it was the law of progress which, he says, "consists in a change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous." ¹⁸ They were alike in other respects too, especially in their independence of thought and the "cerebral hygiene" ¹⁹ which was Comte's term for the avoidance of contamination from contemporary works. They both evidence a Lamarckian bias, but Comte was closer to the precursors of Darwin in his acceptance of the fixity of species. What is important about both writers is their insistence on the need for a close study of society under its different aspects. Spencer's Social Statics (1852) outlines the two main aspects he believed worthy of study: social statics, or the synchronic study of social order; and the contrasting social dynamics, or the diachronic study of movement, of progress and change.

From his study of society, Comte discerned the importance of a healthy interaction between an organism and its medium, or milieu, as he describes it. The following quotations make this clear.

I designate by this word milieu, not only the fluid in which the organism is immersed, but, in general, the totality of external

circumstances of any kind whatever necessary to the existence of each determined organism. ²⁰

The harmony between the living being and the corresponding medium (as I shall call its environment) evidently characterises the fundamental condition of life...one of the main distinctions between the organic and the inorganic regions is that inorganic phenomena, from their greater simplicity and generality, are produced under almost any external influences which admit of their existence at all; while organic bodies are, from their complexity, and the variety of actions always proceeding, very closely dependent on the influences around them. And the higher we ascend in the ranks of organic bodies, the closer is this dependence, in proportion to the diversity of functions; though, as we must bear in mind, the power of the organism in modifying the influences of the medium rises in proportion....At the other extremity we find Man, who can live only by the concurrence of the most complex exterior conditions, atmospherical and terrestrial, under various physical and chemical aspects; but, by an indispensable compensation, he can endure, in all these conditions, much wider differences than inferior organisms could support, because he has a superior power of reacting on the surrounding system. ²¹

Comte was a theorist, one of those whom Gall would have castigated for working "in a closet." ²² Spencer was equally so. We can sympathise with Darwin's complaint that "his conclusions never convince me; and over and over again I have said to myself, after reading one of his descriptions, 'Here would be a fine subject for half a dozen year's work.'" ²³ Spencer's "metaphysical" ²⁴ theories of evolution anticipated Darwin's genuinely scientific theories by several years. In an essay conceived in 1854 and published in the Westminster Review in 1857 with the title "Progress: Its Law and Cause", he propounded his belief, based on the theories of the German embryologist K. E. von Baer, that all organisms are evolving towards states of increasing complexity. He writes that "it is settled beyond dispute that organic progress consists in a change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous." ²⁵ His optimism recalls William Paley's argument from design for the existence of God and the "myriads of happy beings", the air, the earth, the water all "teeming with delighted existence." ²⁶ He tells us confidently, for example, that "this law of organic progress is the law of all progress." ²⁷ He then proceeds to list the vast area to which this law applies. "Whether it be in the

development of the Earth, in the development of Life upon its surface, in the development of Society, of Government, of Manufactures, of Commerce, of Language, Literature, Science, Art, this same evolution of the simple into the complex, through successive differentiations, holds throughout." ²⁸ This essay continues to enlarge and illustrate this theme until it arrives at the conclusion that "progress is not an accident, not a thing within human control, but a beneficent necessity." ²⁹

After such a example of facile optimism, a comment from the twentieth-century geneticist, Peter Medawar, is pertinent. It is "a profound truth," he maintains, "realised in the nineteenth century by only a handful of astute biologists and by philosophers hardly at all ...that nature does not know best, that genetical evolution, if we choose to look at it liverishly instead of with fatuous good humour, is a story of waste, makeshift, compromise, and blunder." ³⁰ Darwin in The Origin of Species avoids almost entirely such "fatuous good humour" as well as the implicitly teleological bias of Spencer's thought. However the concluding section of the work does contain this capitulatory remark: "as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection." ³¹ This remark sits rather oddly alongside an earlier and more representative one, that "natural selection tends only to make each organic being as perfect as, or slightly more perfect than, the other inhabitants of the same country with which it comes into competition." ³²

Gordon Haight claims that George Eliot "saw at once what Huxley admitted years later, that the survival of the fittest is not always the survival of the best." ³³ This contention is borne out by George Eliot's comment from a letter of 1867 that "natural selection is not always good, and depends (see Darwin) on many caprices of very foolish animals." ³⁴

On the whole, Darwin avoided the teleological bias discernible in Spencer. In The Origin of Species at least, although not in the less scientific work The Descent of Man, Darwin also refrained from using the biological model of an organism's relation to its environment to support theories of social, political, economic and cultural organisation. His concern was with adaptation. François Jacob compares his approach with that of Lamarck who was still working in a system that acknowledged the fixity of species. Jacob declares that "for Lamarck, when a new organism was formed, its place was already marked out in the ascending chain of beings. It had in advance to represent an improvement, a progression on what had previously existed....With Darwin, this order was reversed: the formation of an organism precedes its adaptation.

Nature only favours what already exists. Production comes before any value judgement on what has been produced." ³⁵

There has been a crucial shift of emphasis. Alvar Ellegarde suggests that the old question "what causes the adaptive variations to occur?" has been superseded by Darwin's new question, "what causes any variation that happens to be adaptive to be preserved?" ³⁶ The Origin of Species provides the answer, and we read in it that "the structure of every organic being is related, in the most essential yet often hidden manner, to that of all the other organic beings, with which it comes into competition for food or residence, or from which it has to escape, or on which it preys." ³⁷ Later Darwin expresses his admiration of ecological complexity when he remarks "how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life." ³⁸ In these words Darwin adds his authoritative voice to the chorus of sociologists and psychologists who were stressing the importance of "medium" or "milieu" and the inescapable inter-relationship between an individual and the society which has

formed him and which he is helping to form.

G. H. Lewes was particularly interested in the biological and social effects of the environment on the development of the individual. He writes as early as The Physiology of Common Life (1859-60) that "we must constantly bear in mind that Life is possible only under the necessary conditions of an organism, on the one hand, and an external medium on the other. It is the mutual relations of organism and medium which determine the manifestations we name Life...." ³⁹ This shows the biological aspect of his thought. Later, in his 1868 reviews of "Mr Darwin's Hypothesis" for the Fortnightly Review he bewails the fact that "this relation of Organism and Medium, the most fundamental of biological data ... was very late in gaining recognition as a principle of supreme importance." ⁴⁰ He offers what he calls a "correct definition" of Medium: "the external conditions of existence." ⁴¹ This word "conditions" occurs repeatedly in the novels of George Eliot, as for example, in the following comment about Lydgate which contains as well the word "threadlike," yet another instance of "web" imagery. George Eliot tells us that "for the first time Lydgate was feeling the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity." ⁴²

The two main ideas that have emerged from this brief recapitulation of some of the key notions contained in nineteenth century sociological and biological research are: 1) the importance of medium, defined by Lewes as "the external conditions of existence," and 2) the problem of successful adaptation between the organism and its medium, or between an individual and the society in which he lives.

George Eliot made use of both of these concepts. She shared Lewes' interest in "conditions" and her attempt to provide adequate structural correlatives for the interdependence of an individual and his environment led her to develop, as I have already shown, her complex "web"

imagery. Similarly, she was concerned with the problem of adaptation; this concern is most manifest in The Mill on the Floss and her treatment of Tom and especially Maggie Tulliver. Henry James may have felt that "Middlemarch is too often an echo of Messrs. Darwin and Huxley"⁴³ but The Mill on the Floss is rich in animal imagery and ecological analogues, and contains in addition the basic theme of adaptation to environment.

With her passionate, sensitive nature, Maggie comes into collision with a resistant, unfavourable environment. If she were to adapt herself to the demands of this environment she would lose her moral superiority, which would be a tragedy; on the other hand, her failure to adapt causes her untold suffering and only the convenient flood saves her from a lifetime of isolation and rejection, which would have been another kind of tragedy. Maggie quite definitely does not belong in her environment, and she herself is aware of this. Her abortive attempt to live with the gypsies is described ironically as the "only way" she could devise "of escaping opprobrium, and being entirely in harmony with circumstances."⁴⁴ Her early childhood is shown as one constant battle to be accepted; her hair, her complexion, her impulsiveness, her dreaminess are all regarded by her mother and her Dodson aunts and uncles as undesirable. Even her intelligence is suspect and she is utterly mortified when Mr Stelling, Tom's tutor, describes girls' intelligence as "quick and shallow."⁴⁵

On the one level The Mill on the Floss can be read as the tragedy of Maggie in her struggles against the "oppressive narrowness"⁴⁶ of her community, and its "emmet-like Dodsons and Tullivers,"⁴⁷ a tragedy that George Eliot sees as indicative of "the suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind."⁴⁸ We are shown the effects of this "oppressive narrowness" in Tom's life, as well as in Maggie's in order that we can understand how "it has acted on [their] lives--how it has acted on young natures in many generations,

that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts." ⁴⁹ We may doubt whether George Eliot has succeeded in winning our sympathy for Tom or even whether he has risen "above the mental level of the generation" before him, but we have no difficulty in accepting her assessment of Maggie's situation. Earlier she has told us that it is "no wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it." ⁵⁰ And the painful collisions reach their climax in Maggie's return to St Ogg's. The community judges her an outcast and rejects her; she has refused to concede to its standards. As a child she felt that the only way to escape opprobrium was to run away to the gypsies; there is no such solution now. She faces a life-time of penitential efforts to be reinstated with the whole of her world and especially with Tom. However, the flood and the reunion with Tom dispose of her so that instead of living a life "without opium" ⁵¹ she succumbs, as Barbara Hardy has pointed out, ⁵² to a familiar childhood fantasy. By performing deeds of heroism, she wins respect and admiration.

George Eliot has shown the impossibility of Maggie's ever adapting to her environment and even if we are diverted from a full-scale tragedy by the apotheosis of the ending, we tend to believe George Eliot that, given her nature and the conditions of her environment, Maggie did not have a great deal of choice. But George Eliot herself, an intelligent, rebellious girl, with an equally oppressive, self-righteous brother, found an alternative means of adaptation. It is quite informative to consider the possibilities confronted by Maggie in the light of the adaptive possibilities outlined by Morris Ginsberg in his typology of evolution.

Evolution is said to be progressive when it produces types that are more dominant or more varied and abundant; or have more control over and greater independence from the environment; or have the ability to cope with a greater variety of environments; or develop powers of awareness which enable them to respond with greater plasticity and discrimination to their environment.⁵³

For all Maggie's powers of awareness, the only substantial attempt she makes to win greater independence from her environment is by means of her response to Thomas à Kempis. We do not see her respond to her environment with greater plasticity and discrimination. Later I will examine this problem more fully in terms of how far George Eliot's scheme of moral development limited the range of choices she was willing to allow for her characters. For the moment I am merely hinting at the implications of George Eliot's evolutionary treatment of Maggie and her problems of adaptation. Herbert Spencer, secure in his teleological belief in evolutionary progress could write that "all evil results from the non-adaptation of constitution to conditions" from "want of congruity between the faculties and their spheres of action."⁵⁴ George Eliot might well have agreed that Maggie's tragedy, the failure of her community to appreciate her finely-wrought nature, constitutes an evil. But the alternative indicated by Spencer would have required her to accede, for example, to Stephen's pragmatic suggestion that they must now "accept" their "actions, and start afresh from them."⁵⁵ As he says most persuasively, "our position is altered; the right course is no longer what it was before."⁵⁶ The terms of reference George Eliot has offered us as a means of judging Maggie's moral dilemma reveal that such a form of adaptation to circumstances would be a defeat, a loss of integrity on Maggie's part, from which, we are led to believe, she would never recover. Viewed alongside the subtlety of George Eliot's characterisation, the remark of Spencer I have just quoted seems naive and far too generalised. A further quotation, this time from Felix Holt, shows George Eliot

directing her irony at just the sort of adaptation that Spencer was advocating. She cannot, however, escape her moralistic bias, and we cannot help feeling that her giving Christian a physical disability is motivated less by the exigencies of the plot than by her need to show us that he will not be able to continue this kind of adaptation. He represents a survival ethic which she totally repudiates.

Mr Christian, who had been remarkable through life for that power of adapting himself to circumstances which enables a man to fall safely on all-fours in the most hurried expulsions and escapes, was not exempt from bodily suffering--a circumstance to which there is no known way of adapting one's self so as to be perfectly comfortable under it, or to push it off on to other people's shoulders. ⁵⁷

The relationship of a character to the complexity of his environment and the difficulties he may have in adapting himself successfully to that environment are treated thematically in The Mill on the Floss. However, this relationship also provides extended metaphors and ecological analogies in the novels. Interestingly, the reviewer of The Mill on the Floss for the Examiner, 1860, was "so annoyed" at George Eliot's use of "scientific terminology" that he "even went so far as to accuse Lewes of interpolating it." ⁵⁸ Direct comparisons with actual animals and specific characters abound in The Mill on the Floss. Reva Stump comments that "all of the characters in the book, with the single exception of Dr Kenn, are characterised and developed in terms of animal images." ⁵⁹ Maggie is an exuberant and appealing puggy; she and Tom together are Shetland ponies. The Dodson aunts and uncles are emmets or ants. Mrs Tulliver is the subject of a Chaucerian fable in the chapter entitled "How a Hen takes to Stratagem" where her futile attempts to dissuade Wakem from bidding for the mill are compared with the efforts of a hen "to prevail on Hodge not to wring her neck, or send her and her chicks to market." ⁶⁰

Besides these direct comparisons, there are longer, more important

passages of authorial commentary which show how George Eliot found metaphorical inspiration in evolutionary theories. Mr Tulliver's inflexibility of mind and purpose after he has heard that he has lost his law suit, for instance, shows that like other creatures, he needs to "predominate in his own imagination." We read that "there are certain animals to which tenacity of position is a law of life--they can never flourish again, after a single wrench: and there are certain human beings to whom predominance is a law of life--they can only sustain humiliation so long as they refuse to believe in it, and, in their own conception, predominate still." ⁶¹

George Eliot's evolutionary imagery is not confined to animal references or comparisons between animal and human behaviour. The Origin of Species also refers to plant growth and behaviour. George Eliot makes the following damaging botanical reference to Mr Tulliver on the occasion of his inscribing his vengeful curse against Wakem in the fly-leaf of the family Bible. She instructs us not to feel surprise that Mr Tulliver, a regular church-goer, could nonetheless record his vindictiveness in this way. "Certain seeds which are required to find a nidus for themselves under unfavourable circumstances," she reminds us, "have been supplied by nature with an apparatus of hooks, so that they will get hold on very unreceptive surfaces. The spiritual seed which had been scattered over Mr Tulliver had apparently been destitute of any corresponding provision, and had slipped off to the winds again, from a total absence of hooks." ⁶²

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to set George Eliot's awareness of the complexities of social interaction, of the fact that "men's lives are as thoroughly blended with each other as the air they breathe," ⁶³ alongside the ecological and sociological theories of the early and

mid-nineteenth century in order to reveal the similarities between them. The terms in which writers such as Comte, Spencer, Darwin, and Lewes present their recognition of the important interdependence of organism and medium, despite numerous biological examples in The Origin of Species, are inevitably abstract and generalised. George Eliot's novels, on the other hand, take this same recognition, a recognition which as Lewes points out always existed but which was not given sufficient weight, and examine it in personalised, individual terms. If it is the case that "there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life,"⁶⁴ then, George Eliot asks, what happens when a passionate, sensitive girl like Maggie Tulliver is placed in a narrow and rejecting environment? what happens when a character like Lydgate has to contend with an environment like Middlemarch "which counted on swallowing Lydgate and assimilating him very comfortably"?⁶⁵ The novels, The Mill on the Floss and Middlemarch, provide answers to these questions.

It is important to remember, however, that in accepting the tenets of the emerging evolutionary psychology George Eliot did not reject the earlier association psychology. In the same way that evolutionary psychologists like Spencer and Lewes used the theories of learning-by-association to support their evolutionary claims, George Eliot retained her belief in the theory of psychological determinism when she accepted a view of society which Morse Peckham has described as "ecological"⁶⁶ and "organicist."⁶⁷ This ecological emphasis is not restricted only to the later novels but appears tentatively in an early novel like Adam Bede. There we read that in times of great sorrow "the sense of our lives having visible and invisible relations beyond any of which either our present or prospective self is the centre, grows like a muscle that we are obliged to lean on and exert."⁶⁸ And the following epigraph from

Middlemarch clearly illustrates her continuing belief in the theory of psychological determinism.

Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are. 69

When writing on George Eliot's concept of freedom, I concluded that, for her, "freedom is necessity understood." 70 In the last two chapters I have endeavoured to outline some aspects of that "necessity." In the next chapter I will look at a further development of the evolutionary psychology and show how it adds yet another "necessary condition" to those I have already discussed.

The Inborn Half of Memory.

In The Study of Psychology (1878), Lewes writes of the four "great factors of Human Psychology: Organism, External Medium, Heredity" and "relation to a Social Medium."¹ I have dealt with three of these, but, so far, have said nothing about heredity or the sorts of things nineteenth century psychologists believed could be inherited. Although theories of heredity no longer postulated an almost literal mingling of bloods, this was still the pre-Mendelian period. Lewes, however, certainly recognised such aspects of the mechanism of heredity as "atavism,"² whereby a characteristic could remain dormant for several generations, and, what he calls the "potency of the individual,"³ which are basically Mendel's dominant and recessive characteristics.

The work in which he discusses his views on heredity, The Physiology of Common Life (1859-60), shows strikingly the interchange of ideas that took place between him and George Eliot. At this time, George Eliot was researching for her second full-length novel, The Mill on the Floss, and the two of them visited various tidal rivers in search for a suitable location for this novel and its concluding flood. This preoccupation with mills led Lewes to think of the continuous sound of a mill-wheel when discussing whether consciousness requires attentiveness.⁴ Conversely, we can detect in The Mill on the Floss a considerable interest in the working-out of heredity in relation to the mingling of the Dodson and Tulliver bloods in the persons of Tom and Maggie. Some of the references are deliberately folksy and unscientific, very much in keeping with the lack of scientific understanding of the character who makes them. Mr Tulliver ruminates on the puzzling differences between Tom and Maggie and offers the following reasons for his selecting his wife:

'It's the wonderful'st thing ...as I picked the mother because she wasn't o'er 'cute--bein' a good-looking woman too, an' come of a rare family for managing; but I picked her from her sisters o' purpose, 'cause she was a bit weak, like; for I wasn't agoin' to be told the rights o' things by my own fireside. But you see when a man's got brains himself, there's no knowing where they'll run to; an' a pleasant sort o' soft woman may go on breeding you stupid lads and 'cute wenches, till it's like as if the world was turned topsy-turvey. It's an uncommon puzzlin' thing.' ⁵

Mrs Tulliver's notions of heredity run to trivia as we might expect. She was "thankful to have been a Dodson, and to have one child who took after her own family, at least in his features and complexion, in liking salt and eating beans, which a Tulliver never did." ⁶ The passage of authorial comment that follows reveals George Eliot's own judgement in the matter. She tells us that "in other respects the true Dodson was partly latent in Tom, and he was as far from appreciating his 'kin' on the mother's side as Maggie herself." The Dodsonian sternness of principle and self-righteousness are carried in the "richer Tulliver blood" which had, besides, "elements of generous imprudence, warm affection, and hot-tempered rashness." ⁷ Maggie's spontaneous, loving nature is shown to be similar to that of her aunt Gritty, who is "described as a "patient, prolific, loving-hearted woman." ⁸ This aunt who has had eight children, but who "could never overcome her regret that the twins had not lived" ⁹ is known to the children by her Christian name; the Dodson aunts and uncles are aunt Pullet or uncle Glegg, inviting no such affectionate familiarity. Tom's angular self-righteousness, inherited from his mother's family, is compounded with the Tulliver vindictiveness. Maggie's generosity and warm-heartedness are likewise tempered by her capacity for self-discipline, which is a Dodson trait.

From this we can see that George Eliot accepted that the possibilities of inheritance are not restricted to physical characteristics only but extend, as well, to temperamental differences. Lewes writes that "with this inheritance of the general organisation," {that is, bony, muscular,

nervous and glandular structures) "we necessarily inherit its tendencies. We inherit the temperament, the longevity, the strength, the susceptibility of one or both parents...." Likewise, "even special aptitudes, such as those for music, mathematics, wit, and so on, will be inherited; nay, even acquired tendencies...." ¹⁰

Through this Lamarckian concept of the possibility of inheriting acquired characteristics, Lewes and, as we shall see later, Spencer and Darwin reintroduce a faint notion of the theory of innate ideas. The theory of evolution gave a greater impetus to this tentative statement of Lewes. For, if we have evolved over countless generations, and if the laws of association obtain so that by frequent and vivid repetition we establish in the nervous system certain set responses, then what we are today represents an amalgam of ancestral tendencies and responses laid down over the centuries. Our response to the world is still experientially based but it no longer needs to be our own individual, separate experience; we now have the whole history of the race and all its attendant experiences to account for the differences in response and character. Spencer writes in The Principles of Psychology (1855) that "these uniform ancestral experiences, potentially present in the nervous structures bequeathed to us constitute a partially-innate preparedness." ¹¹

What Spencer has now stated is that we are not just passively receptive to experiences but in the important process of adaptation, the adjustment between the inner world of the organism and the outer world of the milieu, we can utilise the accumulated experience not just of our own past but that of the race from which we have sprung. We are no longer envisaged as tabulae rasae or even "Condillac's individual human statues." ¹² Both of these have been replaced by a "racial animal colossus." ¹³ This is made explicit in Spencer's The Principles of Psychology where he states that

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 To rest with the unqualified assertion that, antecedent to experience, the mind is a blank, is to ignore the all-essential questions--whence comes the power of organising experiences? whence arise the different degrees of that power possessed by different races of organisms, and different individuals of the same race?...Understood in its current form, the experience-hypothesis implies that the presence of a definitely organised nervous system is a circumstance of no moment--a fact not needing to be taken into account! Yet it is the all-important fact--the fact ...without which an assimilation of experiences is utterly inexplicable. 14

Spencer explains the "definitely organised nervous system" in Lamarckian terms, as transmittable from one generation to another; we have seen Lewes do the same. This goes far to account for our intellectual qualities, and Spencer explains our emotional qualities as originating in the same way, laid down and stabilised by vividness and frequency of occurrence, not only in our own, but in our ancestors' lifetimes. In the next chapter when I look at George Eliot's notion of moral development, I will show the importance of this evolutionary psychology as the provider of a basis for and an explanation of the moral sense. This with its affective component, sympathy, was held to have been established in the same way as other emotional qualities of the individual.

Spencer's The Principles of Psychology appeared in its first form in 1855, four years before The Origin of Species which, as I have indicated, gave an additional and more scientifically and experimentally based impetus to this emergent evolutionary psychology. Previous epistemological debates between "nativists" and empiricists had been underpinned by a belief in the fixity of species, which inevitably implied the view that if the actual physical species were fixed, then mental constitutions were likewise fixed and immutable. The relinquishing of the belief and the acceptance of a greatly extended time-scale were two essential factors in Darwin's formulation of his "Development Hypothesis." Evolution, therefore, introduced a new factor in the debate I have just referred to, and, as well, the empirical position was greatly strengthened

by new findings in comparative neurology. Thus, as I have quoted before, *and* "the meaning of repetition of associations is broadened, and the law of frequency or habit acquires a phylogenetic as well as an ontogenetic interpretation." ¹⁵ The empiricists may seem to have won the debate but Spencer's "partially-innate preparedness" ¹⁶ and Darwin's "use-inheritance" ¹⁷ lay both of them open to the charge of reintroducing the notion of innate ideas in the form of a disposition, or set, a readiness to learn. Gall had earlier described the same tendency as something "biologically given." ¹⁸

We see evidence that George Eliot subscribed to this view of "partially-innate preparedness" in various remarks about her characters' deficiencies. Hetty, for example, in *Adam Bede*, is described as having a "trivial soul." ¹⁹ Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* has a "congenital deficiency" which makes it enormously hard for him to apprehend "signs and abstraction." ²⁰ Mr Tulliver has a "dimly-lighted soul." ²¹ In the argument between Tito and Romola over the sale of Bardi's library, this is how George Eliot presents Tito to us. "It was impossible for him, shut up in the narrowness that hedges in all merely clever, unimpassioned men, not to overestimate the persuasiveness of his own arguments." ²² This contrasts with an earlier description of Romola that "it belongs to every large nature, when it is not under the immediate power of some strong unquestioning emotion, to suspect itself, and doubt the truth of its own impressions, conscious of possibilities beyond its own horizon." ²³ There is a strong suggestion of inequality in these remarks; not everyone starts at the same point or with the same advantages. Yet a general remark from *Middlemarch* implies equality. "We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves...." ²⁴ This is an unfortunate image, even with the authoritative weight of Quarles's *Book of Emblems* behind it. We lose the notion of equality again

in a trenchant comment in The Mill on the Floss following the description of Tom's intransigent attitude towards his sister. ~~George Eliot writes~~ that "Tom, like every one of us, was imprisoned within the limits of his own nature, and his education had simply glided over him, leaving a slight deposit of polish: if you are inclined to be severe on his severity, remember that the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision." ²⁵ And that the wider vision is something hardly and painfully won she has already told us in her summing up of the iconographic chapter 15 in Adam Bede after we have watched Hetty's narcissistic musing in front of the mirror and the contrasting meditative yearning of Dinah over the world outside her window. For all Dinah's moral excellence, her understanding of Hetty is shown to be deficient. George Eliot reminds us that "it is our habit to say that while the lower nature can never understand the higher, the higher nature commands a complete view of the lower. But I think," she goes on, "the higher nature has to learn this comprehension, as we learn the art of vision, by a good deal of hard experience, often with bruises and gashes incurred in taking things up by the wrong end, and fancying our space wider than it is." ²⁶

These last quotations, while still stressing inherited nature with its implicit inequality also emphasise the nature and quality of experience as a modifying factor. Tom Tulliver is perhaps the only major character to be presented as "inexorable, unbending, unmodifiable" ²⁷ and even he is accorded his act of generosity comparable to Rosamond Vincy's acknowledgement that Will Ladislaw loves Dorothea. The precipitate ending of The Mill on the Floss gives Tom's act a permanence whereas it is most likely of the same nature as Rosamond's, a single act of generosity but not one which changes the whole bias of the personality. Both Tom and Rosamond have the experience which brings out, however momentarily, the finer sides of their natures; and through-

out the novels this emphasis on the necessary experience is a recurring motif. Felix Holt, for example, tells Esther that "it all depends on what a man gets into his consciousness--what life thrusts into his mind, so that it becomes present to him as remorse is present to the guilty, or a mechanical problem to an inventive genius." ²⁸

This emphasis on experience brings us back to Lewes' contribution to evolutionary psychology. He took the concept of biological evolution from Spencer and Darwin and extended and developed it. H. C. Warren writes of him that he was "unique among associationists in emphasising the social data of psychology, which he believe[d] to be chiefly responsible for the tremendous growth of mind in man beyond other species." ²⁹

Lewes' work as an experimental biologist, his fluency in European languages which enabled him to keep abreast of the new developments in neurophysiology in both France and Germany--he would have scorned the notion of "cerebral hygiene" ³⁰ practised assiduously by Comte and to a lesser extent by Spencer--and his early enthusiasm for the ideas of Comte, all contributed to his importance in this field. The Study of Psychology offers his major formulation of evolutionary psychology. In it, we read that "it is indisputable that every particular man comes into the world with a heritage of organised forms and definite tendencies, which will determine his feeling and thinking in certain definite ways, whenever the suitable conditions are present...." ³¹ "The only question, therefore, is 'What are the conditions?' It is the task of the psychologist to specify them." ³²

The study of the conditions necessary for an organism to function with the maximum efficiency and creativity is made possible by the underlying belief in the "invariability of sequence" ³³ that I have already discussed. Identical conditions will produce identical results; a change in the conditions will necessitate a change in the

results. This is the theoretic basis behind George Eliot's rather self-conscious question to her reader in Adam Bede, after we have watched Arthur Donnithorne adopt a line of action which has become a "question of tactics," ³⁴ a deliberate policy to quieten Adam's suspicions by means of half-lies and evasions. George Eliot turns directly to the reader with the following question. "Are you inclined to ask whether this can be the same Arthur who, two months ago, had that freshness of feeling, that delicate honour which shrinks from wounding even a sentiment, and does not contemplate any more positive offence as possible for it?--who thought that his own self-respect was a higher tribunal than any external opinion?" She then provides the answer herself. "The same, I assure you, only under different conditions." ³⁵ (my italics)

Lewes as a psychologist set himself to specify the conditions which lead to certain actions: George Eliot, as a novelist, set herself the same task. As I have already suggested he was inevitably dealing in generalisations and abstractions, not individualised cases, whereas she was working with particularised, individual human beings, adjusting her perspective to include a character's "report" of his "own consciousness about his doings or capacity" ³⁶ as well as providing an overview as a means by which we can get him into clearer perspective. Thus her awareness of "conditions" makes her write ironically of Lydgate, that "he was at a starting point which makes many a man's career a fine subject for betting, if there were any gentlemen given to that amusement who could appreciate the complicated probabilities of an arduous purpose, with all the possible thwartings and furtherings of circumstance, all the niceties of inward balance, by which a man swims and makes his point or else is carried headlong." ³⁷

In this chapter I have been indicating the importance of the factor

of heredity, especially in the form of something "biologically given"³⁸ as an additional determinant in the development of human personality. I have shown that while George Eliot acknowledged this factor, she was far from giving too much weight to it. To overstress its importance would be to define human personality and the possibility of human growth in too rigid and too static terms. And for George Eliot, human growth means, almost entirely, moral growth. However, there is an additional aspect of this evolutionary psychology which appears in George Eliot's later works, The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda. This is the concept of racial memory, which does impose severe limitations on a character's development and the sorts of choices he can make. I will examine it specifically in a later chapter when I discuss George Eliot's concept of duty, and I will substantiate my claim that it constitutes a limiting factor when I examine the implications of George Eliot's intellectual and moral position. For the moment I will give a brief general outline of this concept as it belongs logically to this discussion on evolutionary psychology.

George Eliot in her "Notes on The Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy in general" discusses the theme of this long poem and says that she saw "it might be taken as a symbol of the part which is played in the general human lot by hereditary conditions in the largest sense, and of the fact that what we call duty is entirely made up of such conditions."³⁹ In this poem, and again in Daniel Deronda, she presents us with characters, Fedalma and Deronda, whose lives are defined in terms of a racial duty, a "hereditary, entailed Nemesis."⁴⁰ Both of them spend the early part of their lives in exile, as it were, from their hereditary people, or at least in ignorance of their racial background. But we are led to believe that Deronda's Jewishness is present to his mind as a determining factor even before he is told of his ancestry. The consumptive visionary,

Mordecai, presents this view of a Jewish racial memory at the gathering of working-class men who meet regularly to exchange ideas and extend their knowledge. "The heritage of Israel," he says, 'is beating in the pulses of millions; it lives in their veins as a power without understanding, like the morning exultation of herds; it is the inborn half of memory, moving as in a dream among writings on the walls, which it sees dimly but cannot divide into speech.'" ⁴¹ (my italics)

This might seem but a chance remark of a Jewish fanatic, were it not for other evidence. Deronda attends a Jewish service while visiting Frankfurt and is deeply moved by it. When he mentions this to Mirah on his return to London, she is surprised and says: "I thought none but our people would feel that." ⁴² Deronda finds an explanation in keeping with an anthropological and comparative view of religion and suggests that the Christian religion is "chiefly a Hebrew religion; and since Jews are men, their religious feelings must have much in common with those of other men--just as their poetry, though in one sense peculiar, has a great deal in common with the poetry of other nations." ⁴³ This statement accords with a view of evolutionary psychology which would give all men a common heritance. His next tentative remark suggests the possibility, which is borne out by subsequent events of the book, that there is a specific racial consciousness. He continues, "Still it is to be expected that a Jew would feel the forms of his people's religion more than one of another race." ⁴⁴ The significance of this remark is missed on a first reading of Daniel Deronda but the dramatic irony is very apparent to the reader on subsequent readings. [It is interesting to note that] George Eliot's shift from a belief in a universal ancestral inheritance to a specifically Jewish one anticipates a similar shift in the thought of Sigmund Freud. David Riesman comments that Freud, in his study of the Jews,

"abandoned the historical universalism which would have given all human beings the same phylogenetic experience and racial memory; instead, he traced those particular events of Jewish religious experience which, to his mind, gave the Jews a distinct national character and a distinct racial memory." ⁴⁵

Deronda's "inborn half of memory," ⁴⁶ the Jewishness he is not conscious of, makes him respond very sensitively and sympathetically to Mirah's Jewishness. Her appreciation of his delicacy makes her forget that he is not of her race. "'You know,'" he has to remind her, "'I was not brought up as a Jew.'" ⁴⁷ She blushes, looks disappointed and confesses that she always forgets this fact. Thus, in a later conversation with her brother which, significantly, occurs while Deronda is in Genoa awaiting his mother and news of his parentage, Mirah asks: "'Ezra, how is it?...I am continually going to speak to Mr Deronda as if he were a Jew.'" Ezra replies: "'I suppose it is because he treats us as if he were our brother. But he loves not to have the difference of birth dwelt upon.'" ⁴⁸

All these hints and undercurrents are revealed as premonitions once Deronda has had his interview with Alcharisi and learnt that he comes from a line of politically active Jews, "a line of Spanish Jews that has borne many students and men of practical power." ⁴⁹ And the final statement comes in a format which shows unmistakably the line of evolutionary psychological thought implicit throughout this treatment of Deronda's Jewishness. Deronda explains to Mordecai that

'It is you who have given shape to what, I believe, was an inherited yearning--the effect of brooding, passionate thoughts in many ancestors--thoughts that seem to have been intensely present in my grandfather. Suppose the stolen offspring of some mountain tribe brought up in a city of the plain, or one with an inherited genius for painting, and born blind--the ancestral life would lie within them as a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations, and the spell-bound habit of their inherited frames would be like a cunningly-wrought musical instrument,

never played on, but quivering throughout in uneasy mysterious moanings of its intricate structure that, under the right touch, gives music. Something like that, I think, has been my experience.' ⁵⁰

The course of Deronda's life, as he himself accepts, has been shaped by this ever-present, but inarticulate yearning. The experiences of his politically active Jewish ancestors have laid down in his nervous system, tendencies and dispositions, which make it impossible for him to assuage his restlessness without acknowledging his ancestry and committing himself to the cause of Jewish nationalism. The passage I have just quoted provides a very succinct description of the specialised aspects of evolutionary psychology which George Eliot used to provide a framework for Deronda's search for "some social captainship, which would come to [him] as a duty, and not be striven for as a personal prize." ⁵¹

This completes my account of mid-century psychological assumptions and the relationship they bear to the novels of George Eliot. She adapted and refined the learning-by-association of the school of association psychology, utilised ecological theories and the concept of medium and converted for her purposes the tenets of evolutionary psychology. If she had lived to witness the new psychology of Sigmund Freud, we can well imagine that she would have fruitfully adapted his theories for her presentation of character. Her awareness of the unconscious is already manifest in the following description of Gwendolen Harleth. She tells us that "there is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of our gusts and storms." ⁵² Angus Wilson indicates the shortcomings of the mid-nineteenth century, pre-Freudian psychology which provided the parameters within which George Eliot established and defined her characters. He comments on its failure to encompass greater depths of psychological analysis. "If we look again at George Eliot's analysis of Lydgate or Rosamond or

Gwendolen we may feel that description of character in moral terms, though still adequate to her themes, is already feeling towards subconscious and hidden motives for which neither terminology nor technique is available. We are on the threshold," he says, (and in his opinion only Dostoevsky was able to cross it unaided, "of a psychology for which the older novel forms do not provide." 53

Moral Development.

A belief in the possibility of moral growth is fundamental to George Eliot's thought. It underpins the compromise she reached between necessitarianism and a belief in the power to "will strongly."¹ She uses the psychological assumptions of the mid-nineteenth century in order to depict the moral growth or decline of her characters. Any attempt to understand the complexity of her moral position requires us to range very widely and discuss eighteenth century moral philosophers such as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume, Balguy and Price, nineteenth century scientists, moral philosophers and sociologists like Charles Darwin, Alexander Bain, Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte and G. H. Lewes, as well as the humanist ethical writer, Ludwig Feuerbach. If George Eliot had been willing to practise "cerebral hygiene"² like Comte, and to a certain extent like Spencer, it would have been considerably easier to give an abstract of her position. Instead I am forced to take her as the centre of a set of radiating spokes. These spokes, Hume or Darwin or Feuerbach, for example, may themselves have very little in common. But they all converge on the central pivot of her consciousness and our understanding of that consciousness mediated through her letters, articles, and novels. In a defence of Daniel Deronda, she wrote that she meant "everything in the book to be related to everything else there."³ The same statement could equally well apply to her moral thought, so that any suggestion of a chronological or a linear progression is erroneous. Once again I am moving from an account of her thought which is general and abstract to an account of individual novels and individual characters within those novels. The current analysis is concerned with how George

Eliot translates particular ideas into the texture of a novel, revealing the particular moral dilemmas faced by individual characters. Her moral bias was to reject rigid rules and precepts and to focus on fellowship and sympathy. We see further evidence of this in her often expressed responsibility towards her readers, and her deliberate aim of enlarging their moral sensibilities and increasing their capacity for sympathy.

George Eliot's moral position, looked at in general terms, relates to the nineteenth century attempt, in the absence of the traditional belief in Christianity, to find a sanction for morality in the principles of evolution. The progressivist interpretations of The Origin of Species lent credence to a belief that mankind was morally advancing, even if that advance was very gradual. Writers such as Bain, Spencer, Lewes, and Darwin shared a common moral discourse. Their concern for moral betterment made them emphasise continually the importance of sympathy as the only sure basis for interpersonal relationships and moral growth. The capacity to feel sympathy ensured moral progress and was also an indication of the moral status of the individual. It provided a safeguard against the "amoral individualism"⁴ which was another possible interpretation of the lesson contained in The Origin of Species and the phrase "survival of the fittest." But to state that George Eliot believed in moral progress is not to suggest that she maintained with Herbert Spencer that "progress [was] a beneficent necessity."⁵ She early recognised that survival of the fittest did not mean survival of the best and accordingly accepted a very conservative estimate of the possible rate of change.

The nineteenth century emphasis on sympathy and the use of the term "moral sense" show a continuous line of development from the moral thought of the eighteenth century and such men as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume. But an emphasis on morality as primarily a feeling

introduces the fear of ethical relativism. George Eliot's solution to this difficulty was to state that while morality was something other than a rigid following of rules and precepts, yet rules and precepts were necessary until man had reached a sufficiently advanced state of moral education. The rules must at all times, however, be tempered with insight into individual situations, and fellowship for individual suffering. Egoism is the barrier to moral insight. Egoists are blinkered by their tendency to translate all situations into vehicles for their own needs. It is only the rare person in a George Eliot novel who can transcend such egoism, learn to "see" rightly and is thus permitted to set aside the rules and precepts in the interests of a wider goal. Certain^{characters} finely tuned characters, Dinah Morris, Dorothea Brooke, Romola, and Deronda, achieve a state of moral growth where their moral perceptions become certainties. This aspect of George Eliot's thought, which is one way of disposing of the "bogey of relativism,"⁶ means that, to a certain extent, she can be called a moral intuitionist. This connects her to the "intellectual" moral school of the eighteenth century. The absolutist element in her ethical thinking creates a hierarchical moral scale. Characters at the upper end of this scale have this capacity to intuit moral truths. An analysis of the individual moral growth of one character, Romola, gives some indication of how George Eliot translates these ideas into the world of her novels.

A very significant aspect of George Eliot's absolutism is her use of the concept of duty. Duty is a recurring theme and functions structurally in several novels, especially Romola and Daniel Deronda. An analysis of this concept thus sheds light on these novels and also illuminates individual characters from other novels, such as Maggie Tulliver and Will Ladislav.

In her concern for the moral growth of her characters, George Eliot

offers various ways in which they struggle upwards. Some grow through suffering; others adopt an ideal self towards which they strive. The most characteristic way, however, in which George Eliot has one character "emerge from moral stupidity" ⁷ is by means of the influence on her of some stronger, morally more sensitive person. In an atmosphere of openness and trust, similar to the confessional, the lesser character achieves moral growth. In this technique of depicting character growth, George Eliot reveals the similarity between her thought and that of Ludwig Feuerbach, whose The Essence of Christianity she was translating during the crucial time when she was deciding to set up house openly with Lewes. Her compassionate concern for the individual and the importance she gave to interpersonal relationships show that she belongs to that tradition of humanistic ethical writers which contains such diverse figures as Butler, Feuerbach, Marcel, Buber, and Kierkegaard.

This brief analysis of George Eliot's moral thought shows something of the importance of her belief in the possibility of moral growth. We have ranged from a more impersonal and general world of evolutionary ethics to an intensely personal and individual world where the effect of one personality on another is paramount.

Let us now examine in greater detail the nineteenth century attempt to find moral sanctions outside the traditional confinements of the Christian religion.

Evolutionary Ethics.

"Is it not cheering," writes George Eliot, "to think of the youthfulness of this little planet, and the immensely greater youthfulness of our race upon it?--to think that the higher moral tendencies of human nature are yet only in their germ?"¹ This rhetorical question expressed in a letter to Mrs Peter Taylor in 1853 indicates George Eliot's firm belief in the possibility of moral development. The very word "germ" implies growth and directs our attention to the original use of the word "evolution" as an embryological unfolding. For, like many of her contemporaries, George Eliot sought a basis for ethics in the emergent evolutionary theories of the mid-nineteenth century. The belief that, morally speaking, the world was in its infancy imposed, also, a grave sense of responsibility. Lewes' remark that "culture transforms ...the selfish savage into the sympathetic citizen,"² has the underlying proviso that each one of us must keep careful watch over our contribution to that "culture." We can better understand the moral earnestness and responsibility to her readers expressed so often in the light of this framework of a belief in moral development.

The major text for evolutionary theories, whether biological or ethical, was obviously Darwin's The Origin of Species (1859) which, while it gave enormous support to a belief in moral development, was itself equivocal. This can be seen in the variety of different interpretations it has given rise to. One young man wrote in a letter immediately after his reading of the first edition of The Origin of Species of "the rigorous logic that wrecked the universe for me and for millions of others, [giving] a feeling of utter insignificance in the face of unapprehended processes of nature ...a sense of being aimlessly adrift

in the vast universe of consciousness, among an infinity of other atoms, all struggling desperately to assert their own existence at the expense of all the others." ³ The phrase I have underlined is crucial. The emphasis on competition and the danger that this would lead to a totally amoral individualism were most alarming to nineteenth century moralists. They were seeking in evolutionary theories sanctions for moral action, not sanctions for a code based on the principle of each man for himself. David Riesman comments that it is easy for us, looking back, to understand how The Origin of Species was "so completely misinterpreted when it first appeared, as a brief for a struggle to death among individuals," although in fact it has "much to say about co-operation as a technique of competition." ⁴

In a previous chapter I mentioned that in The Origin of Species itself Darwin almost entirely avoided placing any progressionist or teleological interpretation on the vast body of biological fact he had accumulated. I quoted the one capitulatory remark that occurs at the very end of the work when in a most uncharacteristically unscientific mood, he writes that "as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection." ⁵

However, a later work, The Descent of Man (1871), which is decidedly less empirical and less scientific than The Origin of Species, contains various ambivalent statements about the moral progress of the race. These show that Darwin, no less than his contemporaries, needed to believe not only that ethical improvement was possible but that it had already begun and would continue. According to Hans Meyerhoff, in the nineteenth century, "all the sciences of man--biology, anthropology, psychology, even economics and politics--became 'historical' sciences in the sense that they recognised and employed a historical, genetic, or evolutionary

method. 'The principle of temporality' prevailed." ⁶

Anxieties created by the loss of belief in eternity were severe. A belief in development, (whether evolutionary, or progressive and dialectical,) offered a sense of security, imposed a "sense of order, continuity, and permanence" ⁷ upon the temporal flux. In this mood George Eliot wrote of the "Doctrine of Development, with its geometrical progression towards fuller and fuller being." ⁸ We can detect a similar yearning for permanence and stability behind the "unilinear scheme of cultural development" ⁹ adopted by the nineteenth century social evolutionists, for example, Lewes' selfish savage transformed into the sympathetic citizen. ¹⁰ In the same way the precursors of Darwin had a struggle to relinquish the "unilinear conception of organic relationship" ¹¹ whereby we would have to include molluscs in our family tree, these social evolutionists showed a tendency to "take varied nonliterate cultures of modern primitives and arrange them in a sort of phylogenetic sequence leading to advanced Western culture." ¹² Comte was even more exclusive; his sequence ended with France.

This poses a problem however. The ambivalence I have detected in Darwin's The Descent of Man stems from the difficulty of explaining how our sympathetic and benevolent qualities have developed from our primitive ancestors. Two different passages from this work bear out this point.

With mankind, selfishness, experience, and imitation, probably add ...to the power of sympathy; for we are led by the hope of receiving good in return to perform acts of sympathetic kindness to others; and sympathy is much strengthened by habit. In however complex a manner this feeling may have originated, as it is one of high importance to all those animals which aid and defend one another, it will have been increased by natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring. (my italics) ¹³

The word "would" is conjectural. Some twenty pages later Darwin's uncertainty is even greater.

It is extremely doubtful whether the offspring of the more sympathetic and benevolent parents, or of those who were the most faithful to their comrades, would be reared in greater numbers than the children of selfish and treacherous parents belonging to the same tribe. He who was ready to sacrifice his life, as many a savage has been, rather than betray his comrades, would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature. The bravest men, who were always willing to come to the front in war, and who freely risked their lives for others, would on an average perish in larger numbers than other men. Therefore it hardly seems probable, that the number of men gifted with such virtues, or that the standard of their excellence, could be increased through natural selection, that is, by the survival of the fittest... ¹⁴

The words I have underlined, the use of the conditional mood "would" and the doubt-provoking "probably" reveal the difficulties faced by social evolutionists in their attempt to preserve their "unilinear schemes of cultural development." ¹⁵ In fairness to Darwin, however, I must acknowledge his sincere and honest admission that "the horrid doubt always arises as to whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the lower animals, are of any value or are at all trustworthy." ¹⁶ He is asking, in effect, how safe it is to assume that the moral criteria by which we judge human behaviour are valid or even reliable when our very judgement is the result of natural selection.

The difficulties that were experienced in outlining a convincing evolutionary ethic show just how unsatisfactory was the common nineteenth century assumption that conclusions drawn from a theory of biological evolution would apply just as appropriately to the social sciences. Peter Medawar justly observes that "psychosocial evolution differs from ordinary genetic evolution in three important ways" and that "differences of this magnitude should be acknowledged by a distinction of terminology." ¹⁷ Another source of confusion is revealed by P. J. Bowler who writes that the use of the word "evolution" by Herbert Spencer

appears to arise directly out of the embryological context, with the result that the idea of progression became connected indirectly

with the theory of transmutation by adaptation and hence with Darwinism. Spencer's philosophy seems to have been closely connected with the introduction of the title "theory of evolution," and although the modern theory is restricted to the study of transmutation, it was only with some difficulty that its practitioners freed themselves from the progressionist implications of the Synthetic Philosophy.¹⁸

Believing that progress was "a beneficent necessity,"¹⁹ Spencer found a comforting teleology in theories of evolution and is therefore accused by Morse Peckham of holding a "metaphysical"²⁰ view of evolution. Peckham claims that the majority of those nineteenth century thinkers (George Eliot included) who were able to receive The Origin of Species with a tolerable degree of equanimity, did so because they were able to subtract from it a "metaphysic of goal-directed organic growth."²¹ He declares that "it is impossible to find in the Origin a basis in the biological world for any kind of orthogenesis or goal-directed process."²² Now Spencer believed that "the conduct to which we apply the name good is the relatively more evolved." He effectively ignored the possibility that more evolved need not mean "better;" it could just as well mean "later in time" or more "complex" or a combination of both.²³ George Eliot's remark that "natural selection is not always good and depends (see Darwin) on many caprices of very foolish animals,"²⁴ reveals a tougher mind than Spencer's at work in her approach to an evolutionary ethic; however, her belief in the geometrical progression of Development shows us that she was not totally undeserving of Peckham's criticism. It was not until later in the century that T. H. Huxley, self-styled "Darwin's bulldog"²⁵ for his uncompromising support of Darwin's theories, was able to express his rejection of this common identification of fact and value. He dissociated the biological facts of evolution from any moral criteria. In the Romanes Lecture he gave at Oxford in 1893, he commented that "cosmic evolution may teach us how the good and evil tendencies of man have come about; but," as he

acknowledged, "in itself, it is incompetent to furnish any better reason why what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than what we had before." ²⁶

The belief in progress and the hope of founding a satisfactory ethic on the theory of evolution were steadily eroded by the end of the century. Huxley's dissentient voice is indicative of this erosion but there were many other writers who failed to share the mid-century optimism in Positivistic representations. ²⁷ George Eliot's own optimism was tempered by her conservatism and by her recognition that improvements, while possible, were inevitably gradual. Nevertheless the belief in moral growth is fundamental to her.

If some characters can and do achieve moral excellence what is the faculty that enables them to do so? Let us now examine what, in George Eliot's view, constitutes moral discrimination. The nineteenth century moral philosophers borrowed the term "moral sense" from the previous century. It is the development of this moral sense that allows a character in a George Eliot novel to emerge from "moral stupidity." ²⁸

Moral Sense and Moral Intuitions.

The article "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young" which George Eliot wrote in January, 1857 for the Westminster Review provides an abstract of her moral position. In it she makes a devastating attack on the banality of Young's moral sentiments and the resulting insincerity of his poetry. She concludes with a comparison between Young and Cowper, pointing clearly to the moral deficiency of the one and the moral worth of the other. This comparison is couched in terms which clearly anticipate the authorial disapproval or approval meted out to characters such as Tito Melema and Daniel Deronda. She claims that "in Young we have the type of that deficient sympathy, that impiety towards the present and the visible, which flies for its motives, its sanctities, and its religion, to the remote, the vague, and the unknown: in Cowper we have the type of that genuine love which cherishes things in proportion to their nearness, and feels its reverence grow in proportion to the intimacy of its knowledge." ¹ Young is devoid of sympathy, whereas Cowper is almost entirely motivated by this feeling. Earlier in the same article she scornfully dismisses the notion that we require a belief in immortality in order to be moral, as if only a fear of consequences could persuade us to a virtuous act. (C)

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fear of distant consequences is a very insufficient barrier against the rush of immediate desire. Fear of consequences is only one form of egoism....In opposition to [the] theory that a belief in immortality is the only source of virtue, I maintain that, so far as moral action is dependent on that belief, so far the emotion which prompts it is not truly moral--is still in the stage of egoism, and has not attained the higher development of sympathy. ²

These two quotations provide us with a clear statement of George Eliot's belief that moral awareness is predominantly a feeling and that the

main component of this feeling is sympathy. We can see, also, her definite claim that there are stages of moral development ranging from rank egoism at the lowest level to the highest-reaching, unself-regarding sympathy or altruism. And she believes that sympathy needs to be directed towards those who are near at hand. Part of the moral education of Adam Bede, that stalwart, but somewhat rigid young man, comes from the tenderness and protectiveness of his love for Hetty. "There is but one way," we are told, "in which a strong determined soul can learn [fellow-feeling]--by getting his heart-strings bound round the weak and erring, so that he must share not only the outward consequence of their error, but their inward suffering." ³ Romola rejects Tito and his bland rationalisations of his motives for selling her father's library. She presents a similar viewpoint to that expressed by George Eliot in propria persona in her article on Young. Romola's "nature, possessed with the energies of strong emotion, recoiled from this hopelessly shallow readiness which professed to appropriate the widest sympathies and had no pulse for the nearest." ⁴ We can compare this with the following tribute to Deronda whose "conscience included sensibilities beyond the common, enlarged by his early habit of thinking himself imaginatively into the experience of others." ⁵ Tito and Deronda, by the quality of their respective sympathetic response to the world and especially to those nearest to them, show that they occupy diametrically opposite positions on George Eliot's egoism/sympathy axis.

When we turn now to a brief examination of George Eliot's contemporaries, of those whose works she is known to have read and whom, often, she knew personally, we find a similar emphasis on sympathy as the affective component of morality. We also find explicit reference to a faculty called the moral sense. Alexander Bain, in Mental and Moral Science (1868), offering the familiar opposition between egoism and sympathy,

writes that "there is in some minds, more than in others, a susceptibility to the display of other men's feelings, as opposed to the self-engrossed and egoistic promptings....The climax or completion of Sympathy is the determination to act for another person exactly as for self." ⁶

This same recognition that "egoism and altruism are ...co-essential" ⁷ forms a major part of the thesis presented by Herbert Spencer in The Principles of Ethics (1879). A letter George Eliot wrote to Spencer offers evidence that she read and appreciated his work. ⁸ Spencer holds that "regard for the well-being of others is increasing pari passu with the taking of means to secure personal well-being." ⁹ For all his utilitarian bias, however, Spencer is not trying to suggest that we should be encouraged to feel sympathy for others as the most certain way of ensuring our personal happiness. He states explicitly that "in the truly sympathetic, attention is so absorbed with the proximate end, others' happiness, that there is none given to the prospective self-happiness which may ultimately result." ¹⁰ He was as concerned as other thinkers to determine the state of society most suited to the development of a sympathetic bond among its inhabitants, and discusses various manifestations of sympathy. Like George Eliot and Bain, he compares an earlier stage, which he calls "egoistic competition" with a stage of "highest altruism" ¹¹ which indicates that he, also, conceived of a hierarchical scale of moral development.

Herbert Spencer, as was shown in an earlier chapter, was one of the main proponents of evolutionary psychology. The following extract from a letter he wrote to J. S. Mill provides a conclusive summary of his position. He has been explaining that we have an "intuition of space" as a result of the "organised and consolidated experiences of all antecedent individuals." Using this as an analogy to explain our possession of a moral faculty, he states his belief that "the experiences of

utility organised and consolidated through all past generations of the human race, have been producing corresponding nervous modifications, which by continued transmission and accumulation, have become in us certain faculties of moral intuition--certain emotions responding to right and wrong conduct, which have no apparent basis in the individual experiences of utility." ¹²

In The Descent of Man (1871), Darwin devotes a whole chapter to "The Moral Sense", concentrating, as we might expect, on the biological rather than on the sociological origins of this faculty in man. He writes, however, as I have already shown, more diffidently in the field of anthropology than in the more clear-cut scientific work The Origin of Species. We have, for example, this proffered hypothesis. "The following proposition seems to me in a high degree probable--namely, that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well developed, as in man." ¹³

Darwin, in this work, sounds a triumphant note, showing that he, like Spencer, could not totally resist an implicit teleological interpretation of evolution, which thereby becomes not just a process of change, but a process of change towards a value-laden goal. He writes that "looking to future generations, there is no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow weaker, and we may expect that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance. In this case the struggle between our higher and lower impulses will be less severe, and virtue will be triumphant." ¹⁴ This is a very optimistic, well-nigh Utopian conclusion; we must not fail to notice, however, the use of the future tense and the qualifying "perhaps." In this chapter on "The Moral Sense", Darwin brings evolutionary evidence to refute J. S. Mill and Alexander

Bain, both of whom still held the earlier view that "the moral sense is acquired by each individual during his lifetime." He states that "the ignoring of all transmitted mental qualities will, it seems to me, be hereafter judged a most serious blemish in the works of Mr Mill." ¹⁵

This brief survey of some representative nineteenth century thinkers shows some of the ideas which George Eliot had in common with her contemporaries; inevitably, as she espoused the evolutionary psychology she had greater affinities with Spencer and Darwin than with Bain, or Mill, whom I have mentioned only in passing. Her closest affinity was undoubtedly with G. H. Lewes. In his work he frequently appears either to be describing various themes from her novels or prescribing areas for her to explore. I am not trying to suggest definitive influence either way. Both writers had powerful minds and it seems a more viable conclusion to state that they shared certain preoccupations and concerns, that one of these was the potential moral development of an individual or of a race, and that as a result of these preoccupations they held a vocabulary in common. Lewes wrote a massive work in five volumes, Problems of Life and Mind. The final volumes were still in manuscript form when he died and the first task George Eliot set herself after his death was to edit these volumes and prepare them for publication. The fourth volume, The Study of Psychology is most germane to this enquiry, especially the chapter dealing with "The Moral Sense."

Lewes defines the moral sense as "a discrimination of right conduct associated with more or less direct disposition to accordant practice." ¹⁶ He shares with Darwin the belief that our moral sense is developed from the "emotions of animals" which, he feels, constitute a "rudimentary moral sense." ¹⁷ He recognises that if we assert that our moral awareness derives from ancestral tendencies we are indirectly readmitting some vestige of innate ideas. Our moral sense is experientially based and consolidated

over generations until it almost constitutes an intuition of right and wrong conduct. He sees this as a satisfactory compromise between the two modes of explaining moral awareness. "The hereditary transmission of organised tendencies, together with the distinction between functions and faculties," he explains, "enables us to reconcile the a priori institutional with the experiential theory." ¹⁸ However, he is careful to make explicit that what we inherit is only a tendency. He has already specified this in The Physiology of Common Life (1859-60) where he distinguishes between inheriting a capacity for devotedness in general, which he believed was possible, and inheriting a specific devotion for the Virgin Mary which was not. ¹⁹

In The Study of Psychology (1878) he states that "in man this moral sense cannot properly be said to be connate otherwise than as a musical sense is connate: it no more brings with it conceptions of what is right, what wrong, than the musical aptitude brings with it a symphony of Beethoven. What it carries are certain organised predispositions that spontaneously or docilely issue in the beneficent forms of action which the experience of society has classed as right." ²⁰

One of the recurring features of moral discourse in the mid-nineteenth century, a feature as we have seen that is very much part of George Eliot's system, is the hierarchical view of people's moral standing. This does not imply that people occupy a fixed and permanent moral position but rather the possibility of people rising and falling on a moral scale. We find the same underlying feature in Plato's moral system and can recognise that there is a decided correlation between theories of moral development and hierarchical stages. "Those who have an ethical bent," R. Rychlak maintains, "are naturally attracted to the growth meta-construct" and "the growth metaconstruct has an affinity for the hierarchical arrangement of abstracts or behaviours." ²¹

Lewes gives three stages of moral development. The "response" of the "less endowed specimens of our race" to the "moral demands of society" is "little more than the conflict of opposing appetites, the check imposed by egoistic dread on egoistic desire."²² Then there are those who have progressed to the point where fear of punishment is replaced by love of approbation, "which renders social rule or custom and the respect of fellow-men an habitually felt restraint and guidance."²³ Lastly he describes those rare people in any generation who are capable of "protest and resistance ...the renunciation of immediate sympathy for the sake of a foreseen general good ...moral defiance of material force, and every form of martyrdom."²⁴ It is easy to see how closely this resembles the schematic programme of Romola. Tito is a representative of Lewes' first stage. Romola painfully emerges from the second stage to grapple with the problem of righteous resistance. In the interests of community well-being, external constraints and rules are necessary in order to define limits of behaviour, not only for children, but also for morally immature adults. Those who obey the rules out of a fear of consequences are morally inferior to those who have internalised the rules in such a way that, as Lewes describes it, the fear of "the outside whip has become the inward sympathetic pang."²⁵

Jean Piaget, outlining the child's emergence into a state of "moral autonomy," describes a similar shift from a rule-dominated state to a state characterised by sympathy or, in his words, "co-operation" and "equalitarian justice."²⁶ The description of Gwendolen Harleth as a "spoiled child"²⁷ in that section of Daniel Deronda where she is shown to be very morally immature shows George Eliot's awareness of the similarities that exist between the egoistic, narcissistic child and the egoistic, solipsistic adult.

One last aspect of Lewes' account of the moral sense deserves a

mention. He shares with George Eliot a recognition of how far remorse can act as a spur to moral growth. It can either be remorse because of a sense of falling short of a personal ideal or it can intrude because of a disparaging judgement from some trusted person.

We have thus seen that George Eliot and her contemporaries shared a common language of moral discourse, stressing above all else, sympathy as the affective component of the moral sense. This sense was believed to be partially inherited but refined and developed by individual experience. Let us now examine briefly the philosophic background of the term "moral sense" and of the notion of morality as a function of the feelings rather than of the reason.

Darwin's and Lewes' use of the term "moral sense" does not constitute an innovation on their part. In fact, considering that Lewes' acceptance of hereditary tendencies allows him to concede an inherited moral disposition, which operated in a way that was little different from the earlier notion of innate moral ideas, it is rather ironic that the term "moral sense" originally entered the philosophic language of the eighteenth century as a defence against the "bogey of relativism"²⁸ which was seen as the inevitable outcome of Locke's refutation of the theory of those same innate ideas. The empiricists held that all ideas, including moral ideas, are obtained from the input of sensory impressions. Sentimentalists, such as Hutcheson, Shaftesbury and Hume, ruled out reason as a motivating force in human action. Hume, for example, writes that "reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions."²⁹

How then do we come by moral truths? If we have no innate moral ideas, what certainty is there that we will develop moral sensibilities at all? Shaftesbury, faced with this dilemma, searched anxiously for an assurance that "in the course of normal experience, the ideas of God,

order, and the rest" would "spring up in the mind ⁶...that the stream of impressions" would "shape themselves into the great moral ideas, without conscious effort or willed action." ³⁰ He was the first to use the term "moral sense" and to found morality on a view of human nature that contained more than the self-love of Hobbes or Mandeville. D. D. Raphael defines Shaftesbury's term as "the capacity to experience feelings of approval and disapproval." ³¹ As well as contributing the term, Shaftesbury sketched in the general background of an analogy between moral and aesthetic judgements.

Both of these aspects of his thought were taken up and developed by Hutcheson; they were elaborated further and with greater subtlety by David Hume, "Hutcheson's friend and spiritual son in moral theory." ³² According to Hutcheson, the reactions of the moral sense are akin to the kind of love or admiration that naturally arises towards beauty. Virtue, therefore, is a kind of beauty, a moral beauty. To say this, is simply to express the thought that our warm reaction to benevolence is like our warm reaction to physical beauty, in that it is natural, immediate, and a species of love. Hutcheson claimed that the moral sense was an original datum of human nature. Hume shared most of his precepts but introduced an all-important modification. He believed that the moral sense was the result of sympathy.

Critics of the theory of the moral sense were quick to seize on this feeling of sympathy which was regarded by Hume in the eighteenth century, as well as by those nineteenth century writers I have been examining, as so essential. These critics were alert to the difficulty that to see morality in this way is to place too great an emphasis on subjective feeling. They claimed that without an objective, external criterion, morality can easily become dangerously relativistic.

Hume anticipated these criticisms. He stressed that the "imagination"

took over the role of reason as an arbiter of the feelings and that this lessened the risk of a moral free-for-all. His answer to the charge that moral principles have a universal and law-like character in comparison with feelings which are particular and variable was to agree that if there is to be a stability in the distinction between right and wrong, then there must be a consistency in human nature. He found this consistency in the fact that man was "on balance more of a social being than not" and that his actions, therefore, were more likely to maintain society than to destroy it.³³ The importance of man's social role was, as we have seen, very much a part of nineteenth century discussions of the moral sense. The two main contributions to the development of moral philosophy in our time of those who submitted the claim that man is possessed of a moral sense were that they stressed the notion that "morality assumes the value of society and is incomprehensible apart from this proposition" and their insistence that "feeling has a place in morality."³⁴ The following quotation from George Eliot's essay on Young reminds us how important moral feeling was to her. She claims that "in proportion as morality is emotional, it will exhibit itself in direct sympathetic feeling and action, and not as the recognition of a rule. Love does not say, 'I ought to love'--it loves. Pity does not say, 'It is right to be pitiful'--it pities. Justice does not say, 'I am bound to be just'--it feels justly."³⁵

By this brief incursion into eighteenth century moral philosophy I have wanted to show the continuity of moral theories between one century and the next. The theory of the moral sense is vulnerable to certain kinds of criticism and the way in which Hume, in particular, dealt with these criticisms adumbrates some of the difficulties faced by George Eliot and her contemporaries. They, likewise, had to deal with the problem of relativism if the moral sense was seen to be primarily a

feeling. Comte, for example, claims that "to leave the decision of such [moral] questions to the judgement of the individual, is to give a formal sanction to all the natural difference in men's inclinations." ³⁶

How, then, did George Eliot cope with this "bogey of relativism" ³⁷ which first appeared with Locke's refutation of the theory of innate ideas? We have seen that George Eliot's thought strongly endorsed that of her contemporaries in the emphasis that she placed on feeling in matters of morality. Her position is made clear in an authorial statement in Romola, where she writes that "after all has been said that can be said about the widening influence of ideas, it remains true that they would hardly be such strong agents unless they were taken in a solvent of feeling." ³⁸

A "solvent of feeling" is necessary for the precipitation of ideas. Two statements in Middlemarch concerning the banker, Bulstrode, make it quite clear what sort of feeling normally provides the solvent. The first describes him as "simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs" so that he had "gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with these beliefs." ³⁹ The second makes a more general comment from Bulstrode's situation and identifies "the common trick of desire," which "avails itself of any irrelevant scepticism, finding larger room for itself in all uncertainty about effects, in the very obscurity that looks like the absence of law." ⁴⁰ The ironic tone does not disguise the fact that George Eliot is fully aware of the moral anarchy that could result if everyone accepted a brief to follow his own feelings. It is no coincidence that I have drawn my examples from Middlemarch, for this novel, above all others, is concerned with the nature of evidence, with "right seeing," and with the problems of ethical individualism. The strong emphasis it gives to the damaging effect of gossip is a feature of George Eliot's concern that

morality must not be allowed to degenerate into a platform for personal preference and idiosyncrasy. To understand this, we must take account of what George Eliot understood by "individualism."

In a work called Individualism, Stephen Lukes discusses the various "unit-ideas"⁴¹ encompassed by the word individualism. Three of Lukes's unit-ideas help us to specify more clearly the problem of relativism and to show how George Eliot responded to it. The first of these, religious individualism, leads to spiritual equality and religious self-scrutiny. It will be immediately apparent what an important role it has played in the Protestant individualist ethic. Lukes mentions that the New Testament offers the greatest contribution to individualism. He also lists the re-affirmation of this individualism that occurred at the time of the Reformation, and Luther's and Calvin's preoccupation with individual salvation. Ian Watt places George Eliot firmly in the Puritan tradition along with Defoe, Richardson, and D. H. Lawrence; when he declares that "they all seek by introspection and observation to build their own personal scheme of moral certainty; and in different ways they all manifest the self-righteous and somewhat angular individualism of the earlier Puritan character."⁴² We see an example of such self-righteous and angular individualism in George Eliot's answer to Cara Bray's letter criticising her for publicly setting up house with Lewes.⁴³ It is a quality that very much belongs to George Eliot, the author, but is sadly missing in George Eliot characters whose very education is an education away from such a quality.

The second of Lukes's unit-ideas which is germane to this discussion is "epistemological individualism," a theory about the nature of knowledge "which asserts that the source of knowledge lies within the individual."⁴⁴ The logical outcome of such a theory is total solipsism, although this is rare. The true epistemological individualist, according

to Lukes, is "the empiricist who holds that we know nothing beyond our own purely subjective experience enclosed within the circle of the mind and the sensations it receives." ⁴⁵ He claims, however, that there are two crucial objections to such an extreme belief: an appeal to a shared public world and a shared "intersubjective" language which is a pre-condition of knowledge. ⁴⁶ Epistemological individualism taken to its limits may lead to total solipsism but even a more moderate position makes apparent the underlying relativity of knowledge. Both T. H. Huxley and G. H. Lewes recognised this problem. Huxley, for example, was forced to acknowledge that scientific explanations of the world were merely hypotheses to which he had decided to give his assent. Alvar Ellegarde describes Huxley's relativistic position: "He realized that the fundamental difference between empiricist and idealistic views of causation could not be resolved by logic or observation. It could not be proved that one was right and the other wrong. He justified his choice of the empiricist view by pointing out that of the two, it was the only one that made scientific inquiry and scientific progress possible." ⁴⁷

Lewes, whom J. S. Mill described as having "buoyancy of spirit," ⁴⁸ wrote in 1837 when he was 20 that "we arrive then at the conclusion that we can never know but relative truth, our only medium of knowledge being the senses, and this medium, with regard to all without us, being forever a false one; but being true to us, we may put confidence in its relativity." ⁴⁹ That this is not just youthful effusiveness is apparent from the following criticism Lewes offers in Problems of Life and Mind (1874) of those who "affecting to despise the certainty attainable through Science, because it can never transcend the relative sphere, yearn for a knowledge which is not relative, and cheat themselves with phrases." ⁵⁰

The third, and for the present discussion, the most important unit-idea, "ethical individualism," can be seen immediately to be an extension of the previous two. The outline of religious individualism partially anticipated it. "Ethical individualism" as Lukes defines it, is that view of morality which states that "the source of moral values and principles, the creator of the very criteria of moral evaluation is the individual." ⁵¹ He points out that this belief is latent in Kant and Hume, although they both avoided its implications. Hume's belief that "we can form no wish which has not a reference to society" ⁵² partly anticipates objections to the relativism implicit in his theories. Such social orientation offers a probable restraint against unbridled egoism and selfishness.

The extension of ethical individualism into the twentieth century has produced the "acute dilemmas" of "existentialism, emotivism, and prescriptivism." ⁵³ This negative picture is balanced by the claim that "there is an important difference between autonomy" defined as being "self-determined deciding and choosing on the basis of consciousness of one's self and one's situation--and the extreme and intransigent moral pluralism implicit in ethical individualism." ⁵⁴

7 The saving ^{word/term} phrase is autonomy, in keeping with the twentieth-century bias towards self-realisation. George Eliot, with the typical nineteenth-century preoccupation with moral improvement, relies on moral awareness, or moral intelligence, to coin a phrase in line with her own "moral stupidity." ⁵⁵ The primary component of this, as we have seen, is sympathy. Sympathy is thus the "solvent of feeling" ⁵⁶ necessary if there is to be "a widening influence of ideas." The disastrous consequences that follow from allowing our egoistic bias to colour our judgement have already been shown in George Eliot's descriptions of Bulstrode's self-deceptions. She is even more trenchant in the famous "pier-glass" metaphor in Middlemarch, which describes Rosamond Vincy's capacity to

see the world entirely in her own terms, that is, in terms of her egoistic desire.

An eminent philosopher among my friends, who can dignify even your ugly furniture by lifting it into the serene light of science, has shown me this pregnant little fact. Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent--of Miss Vincy, for example. Rosamond had a Providence of her own who had kindly made her more charming than other girls, and who seemed to have arranged Fred's illness and Mr Wrench's mistake in order to bring her and Lydgate within effective proximity. 57

Feelings based on egoism are dangerous and cannot be allowed free rein; and yet feelings are all-important. How does George Eliot resolve this conflict? Inevitably, by prescribing certain kinds of feeling. Most feelings have to be disregarded and most people are not sufficiently advanced morally to be allowed to trust entirely to their feelings without reference to some socially-valuable goal or principle. For instance, this is how she sees the influence of Evangelicalism on the town of Milby in Janet's Repentance. By means of Evangelicalism, "a principle of subordination, of self-mastery, has been introduced into [a man's] nature; he is no longer a mere bundle of impressions, desires, and impulses." 58 A comment in The Mill on the Floss sums up in general terms why Maggie has been abandoned and rejected by Tom and by the inhabitants of St Ogg's. It reveals George Eliot's insistence on the necessity of individual judgements but stresses as well the quality of feeling behind those judgements. "The casuists have become a byword of reproach," she tells us, "but their perverted spirit of minute discrimination was the shadow of a truth to which eyes and hearts are too often fatally sealed--the

truth, that moral judgements must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot." ⁵⁹

In the same passage she extols the necessity of our acquiring the "insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a fellow-feeling with all that is human." ⁶⁰ We can recognise here George Eliot's attempt to enlarge the moral sensibilities of her readers. But the major point is fully made. Until such time as we have achieved such a state of moral awareness, and such a state is rare indeed, then we must accept and obey the social sanctions and prohibitions of our particular community. Only in an ideal, Utopian world when we have all transcended our state of petty egoism will such sanctions and prohibitions be unnecessary. She discusses, for example, in Romola, the part played by remorse in advancing moral awareness. Painful as it is, our civilisation has not yet progressed to that state of sympathetic moral feeling where such dread can be dispensed with. She describes it as "the initial recognition of a moral law restraining desire" which

checks the hard bold scrutiny of imperfect thought into obligations which can never be proved to have any sanctity in the absence of feeling. "It is good," sing the old Eumenides, in Aeschylus, "that fear should sit as the guardian of the soul, forcing it into wisdom--good that men should carry a threatening shadow in their hearts under the full sunshine; else, how should they learn to revere the right?" That guardianship may become needless; but only when all outward law has become needless--only when duty and love have united in one stream and made a common force. ⁶¹

What can we conclude about George Eliot's relativism? The first point is that she saw only too clearly the dangers of a type of individual judgement based on egoism and on the blind certainty that there is no need ever to look for further evidence. I have especially mentioned Middlemarch in this connection. Mrs Farebrother's refusal, for example,

to scrutinise the evidence before her leads her to make a harsh and uncompromising judgement against Mr Bulstrode. She, regretfully, has to concede that the rumours that Lydgate is Bulstrode's natural son have no foundation, when she learns that Lydgate "had never heard of Bulstrode" before he came to Middlemarch. She retorts, however, "with an air of precision, '...That is satisfactory so far as Mr Lydgate is concerned.... But as to Bulstrode--the report may be true of some other son.'" ⁶²

The second point is that until sympathy, the necessary ingredient of moral awareness, is acquired, then if we are to avoid moral anarchy, we must intensify not relax the rules. Only those who are at the upper end of George Eliot's moral scale are permitted, after much soul-searching, to set aside the rules. And they are qualified to do so because of their sensitivity towards others and their capacity to empathise, to ignore their egoistic preoccupations and preferences in the service of others. Dorothea, in Middlemarch, is a clear example of such a morally evolved character. She spends a night wrestling with her grief that Will is lost to her for ever, not just because a marriage to him would be unsuitable in the eyes of the world, but because his potentially adulterous relationship with Rosamond Lydgate removes him from her respect and tarnishes his "brightness." ⁶³ She finally silences her own clammering needs and asks herself the question: "'What should I do--how should I act now, this very day, if I could clutch my own pain, and compel it to silence, and think of those three?'" ⁶⁴ And the answer she offers herself, sends her again to Middlemarch, to Rosamond, to try once more to represent to her the truth of Lydgate's involvement with Bulstrode and Raffles. George Eliot not only allows her, however temporarily, to shock Rosamond (made vulnerable by Will's fierce denunciation on the previous day) out of her egoistic narrowness so that she generously admits that it is Dorothea whom Will loves. She also permits Dorothea to take an unusual and un-

orthodox step, discard her fortune and offer herself to the man she loves. But even Dorothea is not shown as acting "individualistically" in the sense that she has rejected all principles of moral guidance. Before she asks herself the vital question, we are told that "she yearned towards the perfect Right, that it might make a throne within her, and rule her errant will."⁶⁵ The words "perfect Right" show us that George Eliot is setting up an absolute standard of moral goodness. She may have retained the rugged individuality and independence fostered by the religious individualism of her Puritan background; she may have had the intellectual honesty and courage to accept relativism in the sphere of knowledge; but in moral matters she attacks and exposes the dangers inherent in ethical individualism. We can hear again the earnest and ringing tones with which, according to Myers, she pronounced to him that "Duty" was "peremptory and absolute."⁶⁶ In ethical concerns, therefore, George Eliot is an absolutist. We have a moral scale in George Eliot's novels but those who mount to the upper end of this scale are not allowed a free range of choices across a wide area of possibilities. In fact their range of options narrows; it does not open out. This constitutes a paradox in George Eliot's thought, not unlike her attempt to reconcile a belief in a causally determined universe with her belief in the possibility of educating the will. Her solution to this shows that she is a "soft determinist," one of those who believe that "freedom is necessity understood."⁶⁷ In the sphere of morality, George Eliot resolves the problem of ethical individualism in a similar way. It might be expected that if any of her characters should be granted the freedom to act on their own warrant, it would be such characters as Romola, or Dorothea, or Deronda. But paradoxically such characters have not more freedom of choice, but less. Since George Eliot claims there is a principle of "perfect Right" and since her characters evolve to the point where they recognise this principle and

act on it, then obviously it is inconceivable that they should choose to do otherwise. It is the Socratic and Platonic dictum that "Knowledge is virtue" only from a different angle. George Eliot is not referring to a transcendent knowledge of the real world, but to an experientially based knowledge of the actual world.

She is not the only thinker to resolve her intellectual and moral paradoxes in this way. I have compared her position to that of the Stoics before. And they posed a similar way out of this same difficulty. The notion of freedom and the notion of goodness are inextricably entwined in their thought as the following comments reveal:

there is to Stoicism a positive conception of freedom ...most easily described as the state of mind enjoyed by good men. They, and they alone, are able to "act as they will"; for freedom is "the possibility of determining one's own actions" or "the knowledge of what is permitted and what is not"....⁶⁸ A man can be free, can act as a man, if and only if the external movements of his body follow from a decision which reconciles his own will and moral choice to what is necessarily the case.⁶⁹

This paraphrase of Diogenes Laertius reveals a striking resemblance between one aspect of Stoic thought and George Eliot's moral and intellectual position. It is noteworthy that, for the Stoics, freedom is a state of mind enjoyed by "good men," sages in fact. Similarly it is George Eliot's morally developed characters who come to see moral questions unambiguously. Their freedom consists in their accurate perception of their own natures and of the facts of the world about them. This clearer seeing confers a moral certainty. Their hardly-earned insight into, and sympathy, with human life have largely purged them of egoistic considerations. In this way it is possible to say that they intuit moral truths.

This raises an interesting point about George Eliot's moral solutions. By conceding that morally evolved persons intuitively recognise what is morally right, she is partially offering a reconciliation

between two opposing ethical views. In the eighteenth century there were two schools, "the 'intellectual' and the 'sentimental' ...representing two principal lines of thought....They are primarily distinguished by their adoption of reason and feeling respectively as the faculty which perceives moral distinctions, a faculty declared in each case to be peculiar and not identifiable with ordinary reason or ordinary feeling." ⁷⁰

We have seen George Eliot's allegiance to the notion of a moral sense and the importance of sympathy. Let us now consider how far it is possible to identify certain intuitionist tendencies in her thought, before briefly examining the moral position of the eighteenth century intellectual school.

There is a famous authorial passage in The Mill on the Floss, for example, where George Eliot contrasts rigid rule-dominated moral judgements with judgements reached by the exercise of "insight and sympathy."

All men of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgement solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality--without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human. ⁷¹ (my italics)

George Eliot's use of the word "insight" in this passage raises the question of how far she would have described the moral faculty as analogous with the ordinary faculty of sight. As P. Nowell-Smith states, "the intuitionist is not drawing our attention to the obvious fact that we have moral experience; he is inviting us to construe this experience ... as being analogous to seeing. Moral judgements are reports of what we see when we look at the non-natural world in the same sort of way that

empirical statements are reports of what we see when we look at the natural world." ⁷² The words used by intuitionists to describe the faculty by means of which we decide that something is good or right, words such as "non-sensuous intuition," "awareness," "apprehension," "recognition," as Nowell-Smith points out, all strongly suggest an analogy with "sight and touch." ⁷³

The following statement in Middlemarch about Dorothea's painful emergence from "moral stupidity" ⁷⁴ illustrates that George Eliot certainly conceived of the moral faculty as a physical faculty, a function of the organism, to borrow Lewes' phrase.

it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling--an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects--that he had an equivalent centre of self, where the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. ⁷⁵ (my italics)

This identification of moral and physical vision is not an isolated instance. There is a similar reference in Daniel Deronda in the epigraph to chapter 21 and the following statement in Adam Bede about Dinah's failure to recognise that Hetty's worries are practical and emotional rather than spiritual contains the same analogy.

It is our habit to say that while the lower nature can never understand the higher, the higher nature commands a complete view of the lower. But I think the higher nature has to learn this comprehension, as we learn the art of vision, by a good deal of hard experience, often with bruises and gashes incurred in taking things by the wrong end, and fancying our space wider than it is. ⁷⁶

A letter to Mrs Ponsonby in 1877 offers the same conclusion. George Eliot writes that "pity and fairness--two little words, which, carried out, would embrace the utmost delicacies of the moral life--seem to me not to rest on an unverifiable hypothesis but on facts quite as irreversible as the perception that a pyramid will not stand on its apex." ⁷⁷

If facts about the moral world can become as distinct and as directly available to our apprehension as the "solidity of objects," these facts become features of public discourse, objective, subject to public consensus, and not matters of individual, private and inevitably egoistic judgement. Intuitionism also provides a convenient escape from the fact/value conundrum cited by Hume, when he comments on the frequency with which "is" statements are converted into "ought" statements without any warning.⁷⁸ Again, if there are objectively discoverable truths, we can see the force of that disputed position of Plato and Socrates which declares that it does not make sense to state that a man can know what is right and still choose not to do it. It provides a certainty that cannot be rejected. Intuitionism thus presents a moral solution which frees at least some of our moral judgements from the distorting bias of egoistic desire. If there are infallible, objective moral truths, then in the case of disagreement between two people, one of them can be charged either with insincerity, or more damagingly, moral blindness. We can see with a certain irony, George Eliot herself resisting the charge of insincerity in the following somewhat acerbic rebuke to Cara Bray at the time of her setting up house with Lewes.

No one can be better aware than yourself that it is possible for two people to hold different opinions on momentous subjects with equal sincerity and an equally earnest conviction that their respective opinions are alone the truly moral ones. If we differ on the subject of the moral laws, I at least can believe of you that you cleave to what you believe to be good, and I don't know of anything in the nature of your views that should prevent you from believing the same of me.⁷⁹

I view this letter with a certain irony because we have here an example of George Eliot in her own life requiring and insisting on the sanctity of her subjective, individualistic moral decision, a liberty, as we shall see later, she does not readily grant the characters in her novels. A discussion of intuitionism by Jonathan Harrison provides a

gloss on this difference of opinion between George Eliot and Cara Bray. He describes intuitionism as "an epistemological theory concerning the nature of moral judgements" in that it states that "although ethical generalisations are not true by definition, those of them which are true can be seen to be true by any person with the necessary insight." As to the problem of disagreement there is "no reason why an intuitionist should not admit irresoluble differences of opinion on moral matters, provided he says that when there is such a difference, one of the parties believes he is intuiting when he is not."⁸⁰ This does not entirely remove the problem of relativism but partially resolves it by suggesting that given the "necessary insight" all differences can be settled. George Eliot and Cara Bray might state with equal sincerity that their intuitions were correct, but it might require a person agreed by them both to have the "necessary insight" to arbitrate between them. This would seem to require an ideal, Utopian state, unlikely, George Eliot thinks, to occur, if her wry comment concerning the judge who presided over Felix Holt's trial is representative. "Even the bare discernment of facts," she tells us, "much more their arrangement with a view to inferences, must carry a bias: human impartiality, whether judicial or not, can hardly escape being more or less loaded. It was not that the judge had severe intentions; it was only that he saw with severity."⁸¹

The evidence suggests that George Eliot can be described as an intuitionist but with the following qualification. The "necessary insight" is rare and hardly won; moral facts can be discerned as directly as empirical facts but not until the person seeing has been purged of egoism. Such insight is the outcome and the reward of moral growth. Morally elevated characters such as Dinah Morris, Dorothea Brooke, and Daniel Deronda approach the state of moral awareness where they no

longer see other people as extensions of themselves and their own wants. But the great majority of George Eliot's characters are locked in their egoistic vision and see the world and other people only in terms of their own personal requirements. As she asks in Middlemarch: "Will not a tiny speck **very** close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot?" And then follows the categorical statement: "I know no speck so troublesome as self." ⁸²

When we come to examine the "intellectual" moral school of the eighteenth century, we see that its members, like the members of the "sentimental" school were reacting against the "selfish" theories and the dispiriting view of human nature and human possibilities of Hobbes and Mandeville. L. A. Selby-Bigge points out, besides, that these two schools were "much stronger in their criticisms of each other than in their own solutions of the problem." ⁸³ The "sentimentalists" had attempted to show that virtue is both real and natural by relating it to "human nature." The "intellectualists," on the other hand, for example, Price and Balguy, made an appeal to the "nature of things." ⁸⁴ Price in the Introduction to his A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals (1758) writes of himself that "his principal view has been to trace the obligations of virtue up to the truth and the nature of things." ⁸⁵ Intellectualists, regarding moral distinctions as a function of reason, could claim them as objective, and therefore in some way an expression of truth, or order. For Price, moral systems are as self-evident as the systems of Newtonian mechanics or of Euclidean geometry. He claims, for instance, that he is willing for morality and abstract truth to stand or fall together. ⁸⁶ The reference to Newton and Euclid indicates a superb confidence in the "nature of things." Such absolute faith is not so easy to maintain today when we are faced as D. D. Raphael points out "with

alternative systems of geometry and alternative frameworks for physics." 87

George Eliot believed in irreversible laws and insisted that one element in moral development is manifested in our willingness to submit to those laws which are unmodifiable. It is also our duty to seek out those laws pertaining to social and psychological development, education and so on, in order that we can further progress by co-operating with them. In this appeal to the "nature of things" we can see a similarity between her thought and that of the eighteenth century intellectualists. In addition she draws an analogy between moral and mathematical laws as in the letter previously quoted. The substance, then, of her moral attitude may greatly resemble that of the eighteenth century moral philosophers, but the framework is different. The eighteenth century belief in order had theological overtones, and religion and morality had not parted company. George Eliot was an agnostic and a positivist so that to her the phrase the "nature of things" had a very different connotation from the one it had for an eighteenth century divine. In addition, evolutionary psychologists such as Darwin, Spencer, and Lewes had introduced the idea of ancestral inheritance, and this marks a cut-off between their thought and that of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We have already recorded Darwin's criticism of J. S. Mill for disregarding ancestral inheritance and we have seen the degree to which George Eliot embraced the evolutionary psychology. Moral intuitions may appear to be not unlike innate ideas, but they have been refined and developed in our own as well as in our ancestors' lifetimes. Lewes, for example, while referring to the moral sense as a "Regulative Intuition," makes it clear that intuitions are not to be confused with innate ideas. He concludes that

while man, in his moral beginnings, has a marked kinship with the animals, whose life, like his own, is regulated by desires and intelligence, he stands apart in the attainment of moral conceptions and of organised ethical tendencies, which are correct-

ly called moral intuitions. These latter form a justification for the a priori intuitional doctrine; but its explanation lies in the principles of experience. We have intuitions of Right and Wrong in so far as we have intuitions of certain consequences; but these must have been learned in our own experience or transmitted from the experience of others. ⁸⁸

To summarise: George Eliot's concept of morality includes an affective component, sympathy, and a cognitive component, right seeing, which is indistinguishable from intuition. Neither of these qualities is inevitable. We partially inherit moral dispositions and tendencies and we partially develop them in our own lives as we are progressively purged of egoism. "We are all of us born in moral stupidity," as George Eliot tells us, "taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves." ⁸⁹ Dorothea, in Middlemarch, is one of those characters who achieve notable moral excellence. But there is a character in an earlier novel, Romola, whose moral growth is presented very schematically so that an analysis of her painful struggle affords a clear exposition of George Eliot's scale of moral values. A discussion of how she achieves moral intelligence also provides us with a point of reference for a later examination of the problem of freedom and the morally evolved character. This involves the question of righteous resistance, "when the soul dares to act on its own warrant," ⁹⁰ which is so important a theme in Romola.

Moral Growth in the Individual: Romola.

There are three phases to Romola's moral growth. The first shows her willing subjection to her father's benevolent tyranny; the second traces her acceptance of Savonarola's vision of Florence; and in the third she assumes responsibility for her own decisions.

Her early life is sketched in very briefly. We know of her mother's death and her virtual isolation from the outside world. We hear of her brother's rejection of his father's classicism and his adoption of the despised Christian faith. The phrase "self-repressing colourless young life" ¹ adequately sums up this period when Romola patiently and lovingly tends her father in a vain attempt to compensate for Dino's defection, making no claims for herself. (There is a certain similarity between Romola's situation at this time and Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss after her father's bankruptcy, when all the passion and enthusiasm of her nature are worn down by the dreariness of her circumstances, by her mother's grief at the loss of her household objects, and her father's obsessive desire for revenge.) Romola, however, unlike Maggie, does receive an answering tenderness to her ministrations; her father may selfishly use her but he is proud of her, and very affectionate towards her. This she finds reward enough.

It is inevitable that given her inexperience of the world and its ways, Romola should be overwhelmed by Tito's beauty and gentleness. In a manner which prefigures Dorothea's seeing in Mr Casaubon a reflection of her own mind, Romola falls blindly and trustingly in love with Tito. If Tito had been what she believed him to be, she would merely have transferred the love and duty she felt for her father to him. Her gradual recognition of his duplicity converts her love into a moral repug-

nance which, in her mind, releases her from any obligation towards him. Hence she feels perfectly free to leave him, and Florence, in order to seek out a new life for herself in Northern Italy.

She felt that there could be no law for her but the law of her affections. That tenderness and keen fellow-feeling for the near and the loved which are the main outgrowth of the affections, had made the religion of her life: they had made her patient in spite of natural impetuosity; they would have sufficed to make her heroic. But now all that strength was gone, or, rather, it was converted into the strength of repulsion....She was going to solve the problem in a way that seemed to her very simple. Her mind had never yet bowed to any obligation apart from personal love and reverence; she had no keen sense of any other human relations, and all she had to obey now was the instinct to sever herself from the man she loved no longer. ²

It is for this failure to acknowledge a continuing obligation in the absence of love that Savonarola attacks her most forcibly. He draws a parallel between Tito's faithlessness and her own which reluctantly she comes to accept. We know more about Tito's behaviour, his "explaining away" ³ Baldassarre's claim than Romola does, and are in a better position to assess just how morally lightweight he is. We may feel that Tito's actions are more reprehensible than Romola's, but once we understand the underlying principle by means of which George Eliot is examining the motivation of them both, we can see the force of Savonarola's suggestion that there is something similar in their behaviour.

Under the powerful influence of the Frate's personality and despite her rejection of the outward forms of Christianity, Romola returns to Tito, and to Florence, and starts a new phase of her life. When love and duty were combined, sacrifice was easy for her; now she has to overcome a certain inherent distaste for the tasks she imposes on herself. Only the vision of a "transcendent moral life" ⁴ keeps her buoyant. "She had no innate taste for tending the sick and clothing the ragged....Her early training had kept her aloof from such womanly labours; and if she had not brought to them the inspiration of her deepest feelings, they

would have been irksome to her." ⁵ It is quite clear that it is her respect for Savonarola that preserves her, and it is this, also, that keeps her critical faculty in abeyance. She has abdicated all moral responsibility. Thus "Romola was so deeply moved by the grand energies of Savonarola's nature, that she found herself listening patiently to all dogmas and prophecies, when they came in the vehicle of his ardent faith and believing utterance." ⁶

But this unthinking discipleship is doomed when Savonarola refuses to grant the Medicean traitors the right of appeal to the great Council. Romola's godfather, Bernardo Nero, is involved and her love and reverence for the old man outweigh her love and reverence for the Frate. This brings her into direct collision with Savonarola and she is led to examine closely his motivation. She comes to suspect him of preferring self-interest, disguised as interest for the Catholic Church, to the wider interest of perfect justice. This is, for her, no easy conclusion; it conveys all the anguish of severe mental conflict. Her problem is that of reconciling the "duty of obedience" with the "duty of resistance." ⁷ George Eliot wanted her readers to see in Romola's dilemma a parallel to the Frate's own inner conflict. In a letter she wrote to Richard Holt Hutton after his review of Romola in the Spectator she explains that the "great problem" of Romola's life "essentially coincides with a chief problem in Savonarola's." ⁸ Romola, in a private capacity, is grappling with the same question concerning the justice and validity of the law as Savonarola is, in the public sphere. Her conclusions affect only herself; he has countless faithful souls dependent on him. His injunction to them to disregard the Pope's excommunication mandate may well jeopardise their spiritual well-being. It is for them both "one of those moments in life when the soul must dare to act on its own warrant, not only without external law to appeal to, but in the

face of a law which is not unarmed with Divine lightnings--lightnings that may yet fall if the warrant has been false." ⁹ Savonarola has represented the law for Romola. Her separation from him requires her to learn a hard lesson and we cannot wonder that her loss of trust in him should leave her totally adrift and alienated. She is in a state where "all motive" is "bruised." ¹⁰ The very force and passion of her nature have made her insist that the person to whom she gives her trust shall be immaculate. She has been inspired by the Frate and now her mind cannot accept the notion of his fallibility. This reveals an element in her of self-righteousness and a rigidity. In this respect she shows certain similarities to Adam Bede, whose moral progress is likewise characterised by a greater tolerance of human frailty.

Romola leaves Florence a second time, and although she does not actually attempt suicide, she gambles on her chances of survival by casting herself adrift in a boat. The fairy-tale ending of the novel makes it difficult to sort out the myth from the actuality and the idealised presentation of Romola as a Madonna who comes to care for the plague-ridden village rather distracts our attention from the moral dilemma she has been facing. However, the setting herself out to sea symbolises not just the sick disillusionment she feels in her loss of faith in Savonarola. She has, all her life, been accustomed to surrender her will to the demands of others and suddenly there are no others. She is left to her own resources and initially she drifts aimlessly. But when she comes ashore at the plague-ridden village, she acts instinctively from her own sense of what is right, and thus finds her own strength. This restores her lost balance and enables her to gain a perspective not only on Savonarola and the events of the previous few months but on her own behaviour and judgement. When she is at leisure to examine her motives it is obvious that she does not like what she sees. She recognises the harsh, uncompromising

quality of her judgements, the rigidity which has caused her to adopt a condescending superiority towards other people. Her firmness of principle, while in many ways it is shown to be a nobility, the hereditary pride of the Bardi family, nonetheless masks an inflexibility of purpose. Tito, with his moral suppleness, his lack of adhesion to any other principle than that of his own well-being, damages those with whom he comes into contact, especially when they have expectations of him that he is unable or unwilling to meet. Romola's unflinching integrity is also, in its way, destructive. As she asks herself; "What if the life of Florence was a web of inconsistencies? Was she, then, something higher, that she could shake the dust from off her feet, and say 'This world is not good enough for me.'?" And she recognises quite truly that, "if she had been really higher, she would not so easily have lost all her trust."¹¹

She returns again to Florence and even to the despised Tito, if he should still need her, although we already know of his death. She now devotes her life to Monna Brigida, Tessa, and Tito's two children. Outwardly, at least, her life is very little different from what it was when George Eliot herself described it as "self-repressing" and "colourless."¹² She still accepts the demands of outward ties, of duty, and indeed of sacrifice. She manifests the "stoical resignation"¹³ which George Eliot regards as such an essential ingredient in this life. It is Romola's inner life, her attitudes that have changed. At the beginning she accepted her role as her father's unceasing attendant because she loved him, and she would have done the same for Tito; later she fell completely under the sway of Savonarola and accepted, as a Florentine woman, the duties towards the sick and the poor which he laid upon her. But she was not acting freely; she chose, certainly, to become his disciple and therefore accepted his injunctions as her duty, but she was still, in a sense, constrained. Only at the end of the book, where we

see very little of her, has she achieved a wider tolerance and accepted responsibility for her own actions. She has become morally autonomous, self-directed, and we must not let the fact that the outward seeming has altered so little, bemuse us into thinking that there has been no growth, no development.

This discussion of Romola's progress reveals to us how George Eliot dealt with the nineteenth century belief in the possibility of moral development. Romola's upward growth is schematically contrasted with Tito's systematic moral deterioration. In addition, we are able to observe some of the features of moral growth that George Eliot especially emphasised. Romola's broader, more sympathetic judgement shows a loss of rigid egoism and her final achievement of moral autonomy highlights the fact that for George Eliot, the most morally elevated characters can be trusted to manufacture their own moral values which will nonetheless be socially integrative, and in accordance with a goal of universal good. I will return to this point later. For the moment I will examine what I have called the problem of "righteous resistance."

In Romola's moral growth we witnessed a painful emergence from dependence on outward rules, even those given her by so fine a moral leader as Savonarola. Romola has reached the necessary state of neutrality such that she is no longer "distressed to discern some folly in martyrs and some judiciousness in the men who burnt them."¹⁴ She has achieved a state where autonomy of conscience is paramount, but, as is the case with Dorothea, this is allowed because she is willing to recognise and act on a higher principle than her own "errant will."¹⁵ Romola's second return to Florence represents the same victory over her errant will, as Dorothea's second visit to Rosamond. Dorothea is rewarded by her marriage to Will; Romola is rewarded by the death of Tito,

which frees her from moral obligations to a man she finds morally repugnant. We can see in Romola's success, in her uncomplaining, even eager acceptance of the role of guardian to Tessa and the two children, elements that spotlight the relative failure of a previous heroine, Maggie Tulliver. Romola's decision to follow the "perfect Right" ¹⁶

does not set her in opposition in any way to the accepted mores or social standards of her own community. She has not to endure a rejection from an alienating and oppressively narrow community and, besides, she is financially secure. Maggie's moral triumph in refusing to marry Stephen brings her into conflict with the local busybodies of St Ogg's, none of whom has a life "vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human." ¹⁷ It is ironic that if Maggie had married Stephen and returned, as it is suggested, after her Continental wedding trip with a wardrobe of new bridal clothes, she would have been accepted and lauded. It would have been a romantic story in the neighbourhood of St Ogg's and there would have been few to mourn the loss of integrity involved in such an action.

Romola's non-conformity is less public than Maggie's; it does not involve any opposition to her own community, from which, anyway, she has always been somewhat isolated. Her non-conformity represents far more a state of mind; her freedom is in her thoughts, not in her actions. There are no signs in her of any eccentric outward behaviour; unlike Maggie she has learnt the trick of reconciling "inward reality and outward seeming," ¹⁸ although her outer world is not described as "oppressively narrow" as Maggie's is. Thus there is, for her, none of the dissidence, the failure to adapt which destroys Maggie. Romola is allowed to challenge the rules and customs of her own community. She reminds Savonarola of his own statement that "there comes a moment when the soul must have no guide but the voice within it, to tell whether the consecrated thing

has sacred virtue." ¹⁹ She finds in herself, accordingly, the courage to question Savonarola's motivation and accuses him of partisanship and injustice. She asks, "almost with bitterness," "'Do you, then, know so well what will further the coming of God's kingdom, father, that you will dare to despise the plea of mercy--of justice--of faithfulness to your own teaching?...Take care, father, lest your enemies have some reason when they say, that in your visions of what will further God's kingdom you see only what will strengthen your own party.'" ²⁰ She is shattered at having spoken to her spiritual mentor in such terms and George Eliot hastens to explain to us, (intrusively I think), that "it was inevitable that she should judge the Frate unfairly on a question of individual suffering, at which she looked with the eyes of personal tenderness, and he with the eyes of theoretic conviction." ²¹

We see Romola, having rejected Savonarola's leadership, seeking to find another basis for assessing moral situations. The Frate's public insistence on his own infallibility, (whatever his private doubts), has alienated her and revived her conditioned distaste for visions and priestly fanaticism. Romola's moral confusion is such that "the vision of any great purpose, any end of existence which could ennoble endurance and exalt the common deeds of a dusty life with divine ardours, was utterly eclipsed for her now by the sense of a confusion in human things which made all effort a mere dragging at tangled threads, all fellowship, either for resistance or advocacy, mere unfairness and exclusiveness." ²²

Romola's moral confusion entails what would nowadays be called "cognitive disequilibrium." ²³ It would be seen as a very necessary stage in a person's progress to a higher level of moral awareness. The following twentieth century account of moral development offers an illuminating gloss to Romola's growing pains. "Moral discourse between levels, then,

is much like Plato's dialectical knowledge of the good. A higher-level conception of the good cannot be proved superior to a lower-level conception; it can only be 'called out' by teaching or by natural moral conflict." Such conflict leads to processes of "differentiation and integration."²⁴ The reward of higher-level moral thinking takes the form of a certainty and provides a guarantee, which like George Eliot's absolutism, removes any risk of arbitrariness at higher levels. Morally mature people in Kohlberg's hierarchy, no less than in George Eliot's, will act for the good of the community, will choose socially integrative behaviour.

Maggie Tulliver struggles against a resistant medium, preserves her integrity, suffers and dies. Romola progresses to a state of moral autonomy but her sole acts of resistance take the form of a scornful rebuke to the Frate and a temporary flight from Florence, both of which actions she later repudiates. Otherwise, as I have said, she takes no defiant stand. The next of George Eliot's novels, Felix Holt, shows a young man vehemently opposed to the social and political processes of his day and determined to set them aside. Again it is a case of a soul daring to act on its own warrant. Now that we have become aware of the absolutism implicit in George Eliot's moral hierarchy, we will not be surprised that any undisciplined rebelliousness in him is purged away. After he comes out of prison he works for social reform within suitably circumscribed limits. While he is still at the untutored stage, he is gently remonstrated with by Mr Lyon, the Dissenting minister, for showing arrogance and impatience. "'You yourself are a lover of freedom, and a bold rebel against usurping authority,'" Mr Lyon rebukes him. "'But the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule, and not to wander in mere lawlessness.'" ²⁵ This "higher rule" is Dorothea's "perfect Right" ²⁶ described in other words.

I have been labouring the point in this section in order to foreground the absolutist element in George Eliot's thinking. A later discussion on the implications of her intellectual and moral position for the success or failure of the novels will draw several conclusions from this.

The argument so far has been concerned with George Eliot's concept of morality and her belief in the possibility of moral development. The absolutist element in her thinking has been revealed. It provides an answer to the threat of individualistic self-interest and of a morality which refuses to acknowledge social sanctions and restraints. As a safeguard against such "amoral individualism,"²⁷ George Eliot, in common with many other beleaguered nineteenth century thinkers, raised the standard of duty. A character's acceptance or rejection of the successive duties of his life becomes a signalling device to the reader informing him of that character's moral stature. There are certain characters who gladly embrace their duties, others who see in duty a way of providing a framework for their lives which can free them "from the burden of choice when all motive [is] bruised,"²⁸ and yet others who forcibly reject any notion of duty other than to themselves. Let us now examine this concept of duty which is so fundamental to George Eliot's moral thought.

Duty.

All the novels deal with moral growth in some form or other. As Barbara Hardy declares, "the pattern remains, the people change."¹ And a close study of the different novels reveals that there are certain encoded motifs which enable us easily to recognise the moral status of the hero or heroine. One of these is a character's relationship with his own past, his memory of his childhood and the place where he grew up, his "rootedness." Another concerns the capacity for empathy, the recognition that another person has "an equivalent centre of self."² Closely allied to this is the ability to see the world clearly and objectively without the obtruding "speck of self."³ In addition there is the concept of duty, which George Eliot in Janet's Repentance claims as an indicator of moral awareness which can be "to the moral life what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal."⁴ If, as George Eliot has earnestly declared, God is "inconceivable" and Immortality is "unbelievable,"⁵ then what is there to fill the void, to ensure that we are saved from "the slavery of unregulated passion or impulse"?⁶ And from that memorable evening conversation with F. W. H. Myers in a Cambridge garden comes the confident reply, "Duty," a duty which is "peremptory and absolute."⁷ Not for George Eliot the sophisticated question, "Why should I do my duty?" The problem here is quite other; it takes the form of deciding wherein my duty lies? which, among conflicting duties will demand my allegiance, my obedience? how, in situations of difficult choice do I decide and what criteria do I bring to such decisions?

If we examine the concept of duty, we find that it has had an interesting growth; etymologically the word comes from Latin through French,

and is therefore related to the notion of "debt," of paying what is due. The original emphasis of the word was on "moral or legal obligation; that which one ought or is bound to do"; (OED, "Duty", 4). This relates to man's supposed contract with the State, (the OED cites Hobbes's Leviathan). A further usage of duty includes the Christian notion of what is due to God, as set down in the Ten Commandments, as for example, Ecclesiastes xii. 13, where we read, "Feare God and kepe his commandments: for this is the whole dutie of man." And in a non-Christian age there has been a further change of emphasis, conferring the binding sense of what is morally right. (OED, "Duty", 4 b). Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty" is offered as an example of the later meaning and the following lines from that poem clearly show the elevation of Duty to an absolute principle. Wordsworth refers to duty as "Stern lawgiver!" and then concludes with this prayer:

Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give;
And in the light of truth thy bondman let me live!

Earlier in the poem, Wordsworth defines duty in these terms as

a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring, and reprove;
Thou who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe;
From vain temptations dost set free; ⁸

This is the same tone of voice, with its strong note of stoicism, as that in which George Eliot proclaimed her thrilling words that duty is peremptory and absolute. This aspect of duty implies a duty which is fixed and immutable, against which there is no appeal. A similar concept of duty is discussed in F. D. Maurice's The Conscience: Lectures on Casuistry (1868). A staunch admirer of George Eliot's novels, he dismisses what he says are called "in the cant of our day elective affinities," ⁹ a term borrowed from the language of chemical inter-

actions and reminiscent of the title of Goethe's novel Wahlverwandtschaften. He insists that "relations abide whether we are faithful to them or neglect them," ¹⁰ a statement similar to Savonarola's admonishment to Romola. He also says that what we have to deal with is "a real order not an imaginary one--not an order which might be desirable but which exists. I am certainly a son, I am a brother, I am a citizen." ¹¹

How then does this existing order square with situations such as the one described by Philip to Maggie in The Mill on the Floss where the duty demanded of her as a daughter and a sister is totally unreasonable because it is a duty prescribed by her family's narrow, obsessional desire for vengeance against Philip's father, Lawyer Wakem? Philip, desperately trying to convince Maggie of the truth of his words and trying as well to instil into her a spark of courageous rebellion, says to her that "it is not right to sacrifice everything to other people's unreasonable feelings. I would give up a great deal for my father; but I would not give up a friendship or--or an attachment of any sort, in obedience to any wish of his that I didn't recognise as right." ¹²

But Maggie, adopting, as she often does, an extreme position, interprets this as a suggestion that she should renounce all duty, not just that she should take a stand in a particular case. To her it would be creating a dangerous precedent, what she calls thinking away all her duty. "But," as she explains to Philip, "no good had ever come of that--it was an evil state of mind." ¹³

George Eliot has here created a rather opaque situation as Maggie's feelings for Philip, compounded as they are of tenderness and pity, are not passionate enough to create a real conflict. Although she does continue to meet him, to discuss with him books and art and music, she does it clandestinely, lacking the courage to stand up to her father and her redoubtable brother. It is **not** surprising that she feels she is "losing

the simplicity and clearness of her life by admitting a ground of concealment" ¹⁴ and that later when Tom has discovered her meetings with Philip and very brutally put a stop to them that she is "conscious of a certain dim background of belief." ¹⁵

It is quite another matter when she falls in love with Stephen, with all the force of her passionate nature. This is not a case of resisting a wrongful family mandate but of breaking trust and faithfulness. In the lanes of Basset whither Stephen has followed her she pleads her case (or may we be forgiven for thinking that George Eliot pleads it for her?) that it would be wrong to ignore the claims on her of Lucy's and Philip's trust. To do so would "poison their love." ¹⁶ She is saying in effect what F. D. Maurice was saying earlier, that it is wrong to walk out of an obligation just because it has become irksome. "If," she says wistfully, "life did not make duties for us before love comes...." ¹⁷

Trust and faithfulness remain Maggie's criteria even when she is in the compromising situation of spending a night on the steamer with Stephen, but the majority of supposedly disinterested spectators are not equipped for understanding her decision not to marry him. To most of the citizens of St Ogg's, Maggie has acted not just ill-advisedly but wrongly and they are quick to condemn her. Even Dr Kenn, while recognising that Maggie's conscience must not be tampered with, and applauding her integrity as "a true prompting," ¹⁸ feels that "an ultimate marriage between Stephen and Maggie" will be "the least evil." ¹⁹ The path of duty cannot be clear and straightforward, and the point that George Eliot is wanting to bring out here is that it is a very lonely one. As George Eliot's spokesman, Dr Kenn, says to Maggie, "The persons who are the most incapable of a conscientious struggle such as yours, are precisely those who will be likely to shrink from you," ²⁰ a description tailor-made for Tom who is one of those who believe that there is a general rule that can lead to "justice

by a ready-made patent method." 21

The theme of duty is also a major structuring device in a later novel, where Romola and Tito can be seen, as I have already indicated, to occupy opposite ends of a moral scale. Romola's fierce championing of her father and of his concern for his library is sharply contrasted with Tito's specious arguments to convince himself that there is no need for him to put himself out to ransom his elderly father from slavery. Romola's total moral recoil from Tito and the contempt she feels for him when he blandly sells her father's library are a measure of her commitment to her father's wishes. This is partly a compensation for her brother, Dino's defection to the Church. Here we have another example of a neglected duty and this raises the question how far Dino is justified in deserting his nearly blind father. Inevitably Romola and Bardo judge Dino's action very severely, and equally inevitably Savonarola justifies it as a necessary response to an overwhelming vocation. Romola is tempted to see her retreat from Florence and Tito as on a par with Dino's retreat but Savonarola will not allow this. It is clear here that it is not the action itself that is being judged but the motivation behind the action. Dino's strong sense of vocation was important enough to justify putting aside all other claims. He was turning his back on his family, not out of hedonism, but in order to take up the arduous duty of service to God. Romola, on the other hand, is renouncing her duty to Florence and to her husband out of wilfulness, and she is very distressed and "shaken by the suggestion in the Frate's words of a possible affinity between her own conduct and Tito's." As Savonarola cuttingly asks, "'Who is so base as the debtor that thinks himself free?'" 22

Yet, even if Savonarola firmly endorses Dino's action, George Eliot

herself is somewhat ambivalent; she can never completely conceal her distaste for what she has Tito describe as a "monkish vision, bred of fasting and fanatical ideas."²³ Dino fails to elicit, by a little brotherly questioning, the facts about Romola's intended marriage, and George Eliot's judgement of him is quite unequivocal; she describes the specifically Christian interpretation of his vision of Romola's distressed and alienated condition as coming from "the shadowy region where human souls seek wisdom" in contrast, as she says, to "the human sympathies which are the very life and substance of our wisdom."²⁴ Yet, as Mr Lyon insists in Felix Holt, "the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule,"²⁵ and it is to seek a higher rule that Dino has deserted his father. George Eliot herself was unquestionably aware of this conflict between "individual suffering" and "theoretic conviction," and says quite explicitly that "if such energetic belief, pursuing a grand and remote end, is often in danger of becoming a demon-worship, in which the votary lets his son and daughter pass through the fire with a readiness that hardly looks like sacrifice, tender fellow-feeling for the nearest has its danger too, and is apt to be timid and sceptical towards the larger aims without which life cannot rise into religion."²⁶

The search for a commitment, a "duty," is very relevant to a study of Middlemarch, whether we consider Lydgate's medical researches, Casaubon's misdirected mythological quest, Fred Vincy's discovery of "work" in Caleb Garth's sense, or Dorothea's resigned acceptance that she can be effective only as a wife and mother. It also illuminates George Eliot's treatment of the much maligned character, Will Ladislaw.

The early part of the novel shows Will indulging himself by chasing inspiration throughout the length and breadth of Europe. It appears that "Will had declined to fix on any more precise destination than the en-

tire area of Europe. Genius, he held, is necessarily intolerant of fetters: on the one hand it must have the utmost play for its spontaneity; on the other, it may confidently await those messages from the universe which summon it to its peculiar work, only placing itself in an attitude of receptivity towards all sublime chances. The attitudes of receptivity are various, and Will had sincerely tried many of them." ²⁷

His state of mind is made very clear to us from various conversations with Dorothea, such as the following where he expounds his Shelleyan definition of a poet and says to her that "to be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment is but a hand playing with finely-ordered variety on the chords of emotion--a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge." ²⁸ Dorothea responds with a gently prosaic but salutary reminder that he leaves out the poems. "I think," she says "that they are wanted to complete the poet." ²⁹ Here is a case where Dorothea could well reproach him for his want of "a sturdy neutral delight in things as they [are]." ³⁰

Under the influence of Dorothea and his desire to stand well in her eyes, Will first takes the independent step of refusing Mr Casaubon's allowance, then takes an interest in political journalism and ultimately sets out for London, to eat his dinners as a barrister in "preparation for all public business." ³¹ And the fact that we are told in the Finale that "Will became an ardent public man" who was "at last returned to Parliament," ³² shows that he did indeed carry out his intentions.

I will not consider here his suitability as a second husband for Dorothea or how far critical objections towards him belong in the category of complaints about his long hair and unconventional habits, for example, that of lying, stretched out full-length on hearth rugs; com-

plaints which range many critics on the side of Mrs Cadwallader as upholders of the proprieties. What interests me in so brief a recounting of his career is a passage of authorial comment which occurs at the time when Will is rejecting his life of unfettered spontaneity and is choosing a life of committed service. It is made quite clear to us how strong an influence his love for Dorothea exerts over his choice of activity, and this provides a parallel to the influence Mary Garth has over her wayward and undisciplined lover, Fred Vincy. We learn that "it is undeniable that but for the desire to be where Dorothea was, and perhaps the want of knowing what else to do, Will would not at this time have been meditating on the needs of the English people or criticising English statesmanship: he would probably have been rambling in Italy sketching plans for several dramas, trying prose and finding it too jejune, trying verse and finding it too artificial, beginning to copy 'bits' from old pictures, leaving off because they were 'no good', and observing that, after all, self-culture was the principal point; while in politics he would have been sympathising warmly with liberty and progress in general." ³³ George Eliot's ironic dismissal of this as a programme for life is obvious, even if she left it at that. But she paints a contrast between what Will would have been doing and what he now, rather to his surprise, finds himself doing and even enjoying, and tells us that "our sense of duty must wait for some work which shall take the place of dilettanteism and make us feel that the quality of our action is not a matter of indifference." ³⁴ It would appear that "Ladislaw had now accepted his bit of work, though it was not that indeterminate loftiest thing which he had once dreamed of as alone worthy of continuous effort." ³⁵

In terms of this examination of George Eliot's concept of "duty," it is the opposition of dilettanteism and duty which is interesting. The

same opposition is developed more fully in the case of the eponymous hero of her last novel, Daniel Deronda. But in this novel, and in the long poem, The Spanish Gypsy, George Eliot's assimilation of the tenets of evolutionary psychology introduces a new slant.

In The Spanish Gypsy, Fedalma is apprised on the eve of her marriage to don Silva, the Spanish nobleman, that she is a gypsy princess with obligations to her hereditary people, the Zincali, which make it impossible for her to marry him. (Don Silva, desperate at her decision, follows her and renounces his own national loyalties in order to stay with her; a ruinous course as it turns out, causing the death of Fedalma's father and the probable failure of the gypsy hopes of re-establishing themselves in Africa.) Fedalma's father, Zarca, in his passionate attempt to persuade her to accept the burden he is laying on her, addresses her in words that closely resemble Maggie's justification to Stephen of why she must reject him. He declares:

for the sanctity of oaths
Lies not in lightning that avenges them,
But in the injury wrought by broken bonds³⁶
And in the garnered good of human trust.

The comparison with Maggie's situation in The Mill on the Floss would seem to suggest that this is just a further development of the same problem, that of finding a duty which is consonant with the past. But there is an additional element. It appears that in Fedalma's past, in her earliest childhood before she was separated from her gypsy people, an oath of allegiance was sworn on her behalf, and this is now presented as a binding force. She recognises this fully when she bursts forth:

O mother life,
That seemed to nourish me so tenderly,
Even in the womb you vowed me to the fire,
Hung on my soul the burden of men's hopes,
And pledged me to redeem!--I'll pay the debt.³⁷

She accepts in these words a duty laid on her long before she had a choice in the matter. In her "Notes on The Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy in general", George Eliot describes its subject matter. "I saw," she claims, that "it might be taken as a symbol of the part which is played in the general human lot by hereditary conditions in the largest sense, and of the fact that what we call duty is entirely made up of such conditions." 38

If evolutionary psychology indicates that we can find in a study of our ancestors an explanation of man's present condition, this new emphasis on hereditary conditions implies that we are not only stringently circumscribed by the present state of society but that we are now further encumbered by a racial past which George Eliot presents as equally binding as our personal past. Thomas Pinney in his article, "The Authority of the Past in George Eliot's Novels", remarks that "the past is still to bind" her characters, but it has been "newly interpreted not as a living body of experience but as the sum of remote hereditary conditions." 39

Let us now return to Daniel Deronda, which even more than The Spanish Gypsy shows the pressure of this "hereditary, entailed Nemesis" 40 in the form of a racial duty. "The past determines duty for Deronda,"

Pinney informs us, "just as it does for Maggie, with the significant difference that Deronda's is a 'past' he never had....Clearly in the earlier novels the authority for the past is inseparable from the affections that grow out of personal experience; in Daniel Deronda it is not." 41

Pinney later describes Deronda's acceptance of his Jewish mission in terms which are reminiscent of Comte's belief that the ultimate moral value comes in service to a national, not merely a familial or social cause. He claims that "loyalties ...must now be given to the service of the whole race. The change is away from direct personal relationships and towards the service of collective entities." 42

Deronda's specifically Jewish racial inheritance, of which he is ignorant for much of the book, provides an explanation for many of the seemingly irrational and non-realistic elements of the book, and most particularly for the relationship with the dying visionary, Mordecai. It is as if, in order for us to accept that Deronda will be grateful to have the responsibility of his Jewishness revealed to him, we have also to accept that it is so strong an influence on his life that it manifests itself before he himself is aware of it. Deronda refers to "an inherited yearning--the effect of brooding, passionate thoughts in many ancestors --thoughts that seem to have been intensely present in my grandfather." ⁴³

The notion of duty as "hereditary conditions," ⁴⁴ enlarges our understanding of the complex interplay of plots in this novel. Daniel Deronda has frequently been criticised for the overweighting of the "Jewish question." F. R. Leavis even went so far as to suggest at one stage, ⁴⁵ (although he later changed his mind), ⁴⁶ that it would make a much more satisfactory novel if the Jewish question were omitted altogether and a new novel called Gwendolen Harleth were salvaged from the remains. This complaint and others like it point mainly to the fact that in writing the Jewish dimension of the book, George Eliot was having to rely heavily on research; we have seen something similar in the Italian background of Romola. The Jewish dimension was not something directly related to her own experience; it required a supreme effort of imagination for her to construct the necessary situations and the strain is evident. However, we need to decide whether the complaint against Daniel Deronda is a response to this feeling of strain, a recognition that George Eliot was not moving confidently in this unfamiliar element, so that the sections dealing with Deronda when he is apart from Gwendolen lack the vividness and spontaneous inevitability of the Gwendolen/Grandcourt sections, or whether it concerns a more basic structural flaw. A brilliant psych-

ological novel concealed within a less brilliant and intrinsically less interesting novel is one thing; a novel seriously flawed because the two main sections are only arbitrarily related, is another.

An examination of Daniel Deronda in the light of this theme of duty as an indication of moral standing and possible moral growth shows more clearly the connection between the two sections and the very careful structural patterning that George Eliot intended. This can be summed up in one of her authorial statements that "many of us complain that half our birthright is sharp duty: Deronda was more inclined to complain that he was robbed of this half." ⁴⁷

This gives a rough sketch, an outline only, of one theme of the book. Gwendolen is contrasted with Deronda. She seeks to master her own life, to take the reins and ride skilfully. She acknowledges but scantily any claims upon her, but cares very greatly about the fulfilment of her claims on the world. Deronda, on the other hand, is reverently looking for "the complete ideal shape of that personal duty and citizenship which lay in his own thought like sculptured fragments certifying some beauty yearned after but not traceable by divination." ⁴⁸

For both characters there arises the question of identity; each has to discover who he or she is. Gwendolen is described as having no real root to her past; she has not lived long enough in any one place to have formed a lasting attachment to it. She feels stifled by her family situation. She is determined that "she [will] no longer be sacrificed to creatures worth less than herself," ⁴⁹ which undoubtedly refers to the four "superfluous" sisters, ⁵⁰ although the degree to which she actually has sacrificed herself to them is left very much in the air. All we do know is that the "strongest assertion she was able to make of her individual claims was to leave out Alice's lessons (on the principle that Alice was more likely to excel in ignorance)." ⁵¹ Gwendolen's ambition,

"to do what was pleasant to herself in a striking manner," ⁵² is set within the ironic framework of her ignorance that she is "held captive by the ordinary wirework of social forms" and thus can do "nothing in particular." ⁵³ The passion in her to be independent is grand but the means for her to achieve that independence are slight. Nothing expresses this contrast more vividly than the following lines of authorial comment, that "she rejoiced to feel herself exceptional; but her horizon was that of the genteel romance where the heroine's soul poured out in her journal is full of vague power, originality, and general rebellion, while her life moves strictly in the sphere of fashion; and if she wanders into a swamp, the pathos lies partly, so to speak, in her having on her satin shoes." ⁵⁴

This gives a portrait on two levels: Gwendolen's picture of herself is a portrait full of brilliancy, all foreground with scarcely any middle distance or background to relate her to the rest of the world; but George Eliot skilfully fills out for us the background so that we can see what Gwendolen cannot, that this brilliant portrait is really just a detail from a massively constructed picture. No wonder, then, that when Deronda tells her something of his plans for going to the East, "the world seemed getting larger round poor Gwendolen, and she more solitary and helpless in the midst." ⁵⁵ She thought she had the canvas to herself, or at least shared it only with the necessary admirers, and she had no inkling, until then, of the distance between her mind and Deronda's.

If we set the proud, self-contained, self-delighting Gwendolen of the first part of the book alongside the somewhat pathetic, self-doubting woman of the final pages, we can make a fairly firm judgement of George Eliot's intentions with regard to her. Gwendolen, after proudly rejecting all claims on herself, and roundly insisting on her own claims, has been chastened and subdued. The injury she has done to Mrs Glasher and

the children--which she would perhaps have felt less if Grandcourt had been as she had imagined him, a man susceptible to her charm and able to be mastered by her so that she could have continued to "make her penances easy" ⁵⁶--fills her with a remorse which eats into her and forces her into an awareness of the rights of other people. She has come to "look at [her] life as a debt" ⁵⁷ and instead of shunning them, to find comfort and surety in the discharge of quite simple duties, "primary duties," ⁵⁸ defined by her position as sister and daughter.

In strong contrast to Gwendolen, we see Deronda, equally adrift and unbonded to the past, secretly complaining that because of "the way in which others had ordered his ...life" he has not had the "full guidance of primary duties." ⁵⁹ The not knowing his parentage gives him a sense of alienation and separateness; he struggles to establish for himself an identity. The sympathy and understanding he shows for a wide variety of human situations, far from giving him a sense of belonging, seem to reduce his contacts with the world to a mere dilettanteism. George Eliot, as too often with this character, chooses to "tell" us of his dilemma rather than "show" it to us dramatically. Thus we see his problem in her terms as when she says that "a too reflective and diffusive sympathy was in danger of paralysing in him that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force." ⁶⁰ He is adrift and wandering, like a "yearning, disembodied spirit," ⁶¹ the perfect exemplar of Feuerbach's description of a man who has no aim. Feuerbach, in The Essence of Christianity, states in George Eliot's translation, that "he who has no aim, has no home, no sanctuary; aimlessness is the greatest unhappiness." In contrast with this he continues: "He who has an aim, an aim which is in itself true and essential, has, eo ipso, a religion." ⁶² Deronda's aimless state seems to indicate, in embryonic form, the state of despair which leads some Existentialists,

as Paul Tillich maintains, "to leap from doubt to dogmatic certitude, from meaninglessness to a set of symbols in which the meaning of a special ecclesiastical or political group is embodied."⁶³ This anticipates Deronda's leap into Jewish nationalist politics. Deronda feels that his life is meaningless; Gwendolen, that hers is dreary. Both show increasingly the alienation from themselves and the life around them that becomes so strong a theme in later writers. Both respond to their situations with varying degrees of egoism. Gwendolen seeks to achieve identity and vividness by doing "whatever she could do so as to strike others with admiration, and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living";⁶⁴ Deronda keeps himself apart, encouraging, even inviting, other people's confidences but not trusting them with his doubts and difficulties in return, and occasionally even feeling a twinge of resentment that they fail to see him as human. Both of them are acting a part; Gwendolen more obviously, and we can see how her extreme sensitivity to the opinions of other people becomes a powerful weapon in Grandcourt's armoury against her. She exerts the utmost of her pride and control to conceal from her mother and the world that she has made a disastrous marriage, and to all but Deronda appears totally self-contained. But Deronda, equally, is unable, as it were, to lose face, or to appear vulnerable; his recoil from the Jewish friend of his grandfather, and his distancing himself from a possible friend at school, are equally self-protective mechanisms, perfectly credible and justifiable, but examples no less of mauvaise foi. He certainly represents, however, a more advanced moral state than Gwendolen, who, to begin with, feels that it is the world that is to blame for her misfortunes and seeks to evade responsibilities and duties. Deronda, on the other hand, fully recognises the dangers of aimlessness and insufficient motivation in himself and welcomes with relief the responsibilities and commitments

that come with the revelation of his Jewish heritage.

When his mother, driven by the avenging Furies, reveals to him the secret of his Jewish birth, he does not just passively accept his heritage. It brings with it, for him, an identity, a passionate identification with his ancestral people and a willing assumption of any obligations or duties that belong to the fact of his being born a Jew. He declares to his mother, "I consider it my duty--it is the impulse of my feeling--to identify myself, as far as possible, with my hereditary people."⁶⁵ Far from feeling shackled by his recognition of his new duties, "he came back with what was better than freedom--with a duteous bond."⁶⁶ His path is the opposite in that sense to Gwendolen's; where she is shown the futility of struggling to escape from any such "duteous bond" and of wanting to declare her separateness from all such moral obligations, Deronda is lost and adrift because he lacks the sense of purpose, as he defines it, "some social captainship, which could come to him as a duty, and not be striven for as a personal prize."⁶⁷

Duty can be seen, therefore, to govern both their lives, and their final readiness to accept their obligations, eagerly in the case of Deronda, and more reluctantly in the case of Gwendolen, reveals to us their capacity for moral growth. It is not just that George Eliot in her novels creates a moral scale related to the question of duty; duty is seen as something we must perform; gladly and willingly if possible, but with the assistance of external law until such time as "duty and love have united."⁶⁸ Duty provides a commitment, a partisanship, but what seems to be more important, it frees the person from the necessity of making difficult decisions without any real motivation; for example, Deronda's fear of having "to make an arbitrary selection where he felt no preponderance of desire,"⁶⁹ or Romola's awareness of "that burden of choice which presses with heavier and heavier weight when claims

have loosed their guiding hold." ⁷⁰ To characters who are consciously seeking for "that supremely hallowed motive which men call duty," ⁷¹ this awareness of the loss of guidance brings with it a dread.

When we examine Maggie's anguished self-examination as she is faced with a choice that will set her against the current of her life up to that point and make her betray all that she holds as sacred, one thing emerges very clearly; that there is in her an underlying fear. Remarks like "wayward choice" and "losing the clue of her life" ⁷² recur. We find the same element of fear in Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty" when he sets duty up against his awareness of "unchartered freedom" and "the weight of chance-desires," ⁷³ and similarly it appears in a letter from George Eliot to the Brays after the death of her father when she expressed her concern about her isolation from any moral guidance without his restraining influence. "What shall I be without my father?" she writes. "It will seem as if part of my moral nature were gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming earthly sensual and devilish for want of that purifying, restraining influence." ⁷⁴ We can understand how easy it is for Freudian analysts to turn from an examination of Maggie's fear of independence (as in Bernard Paris' recent re-evaluation of The Mill on the Floss in Horneyan and Maslovian terms) ⁷⁵ as a classic case of neurotic self-distrust and dependency causing crippling anxiety and paralysis, to a study of the symptoms in George Eliot herself. And she is not an isolated case. Paul Tillich says pertinently that "if the spiritual contents [of life] have lost their power the self-affirmation of the moral personality is a way in which meaning can be rediscovered. The simple call to duty can save from emptiness." ⁷⁶ (my italics) This fear of "unchartered freedom" ⁷⁷ would appear to be a fundamental character trait of those living under the shadow of the French revolution, who had lost their religious faith but who had retained their belief in

original sin and the need for man to be stringently guarded and protected from himself. An optimistic determinist like Herbert Spencer could happily believe that there was taking place a steady attrition of the self-maintenance instincts and an equivalent development of the race-maintenance instincts, as our civilisation moved out of the military phase and entrenched itself more firmly in the industrial phase where co-operation and fellowship become the order of the day. But George Eliot was a less thorough-going determinist with a melancholy turn of mind, believing indeed in progress, but a slow foot-slogging progress and she would have heartily agreed with this statement of Auguste Comte that "self-love in the Positive system is regarded as the great infirmity of our nature: an infirmity which unremitting discipline on the part of each individual and of society may materially palliate, but will never radically cure." ⁷⁸ The only safeguard is the development of altruism to counteract the negative effects of an egoistic and self-regarding view of other people. In The Study of Psychology (1878), Lewes maintains that "the law of animal action is Individualism: its motto is 'Each for himself against all.' The ideal of human action is Altruism: its motto is 'Each with others, all for each.'" ⁷⁹ Leaving aside the validity of this description of animal action which twentieth century ethological studies have seriously disputed, there is still contained in this statement a complete identification of individualism and egoism. An early nineteenth century usage of individualism, (1835), is given as "self-centred feeling or conduct as a principle; a mode of life in which the individual pursues his own ends or follows out his own ideas; free or independent individual action or thought; egoism; Kingsley's tautological utterance, "selfish individualism" comes under this usage. (OED, "Individualism", 1) Later in the century, 1884, the word individualism has been politicised and it is now seen as the anto-

nym not of altruism but of collectivism. It is now used to describe the "social theory which advocates the free and independent action of the individual, as opposed to communistic methods of organisation and state interference." (OED, "Individualism", 2)

In The Open Society and its Enemies, Karl Popper expresses concern at the fact that individualism, because of these two quite distinct usages, can be, and often is taken as the opposite of both altruism and collectivism. He declares that "it is interesting that for Plato, and for most Platonists, an altruistic individualism (as, for instance, that of Dickens) cannot exist. According to Plato, the only alternative to collectivism is egoism; he simply identifies all collectivism with altruism, and all individualism with egoism." Thus "in defending collectivism, he can appeal to our humanitarian feeling of unselfishness; in his attack, he can brand all individualists as selfish, as incapable of devotion to anything but themselves." ⁸⁰

It is easy to see how this criticism of Plato could also apply to George Eliot and other nineteenth century thinkers who saw no problem in the identification of individualism with egoism. Stephen Lukes, discussing the various "unit-ideas" of the term "individualism" comments on the prevalence in the first half of the nineteenth century of the pejorative meaning signified by the French word, individualisme, which implied the "social, moral and political isolation of rootless, self-interested, and acquisitive individuals unconcerned with social ideals and unamenable to social control." ⁸¹ It is individualism in this sense that so threatens George Eliot and explains Wordsworth's prayer in his "Ode to Duty" that duty will provide a guide to protect him against "unchartered freedom" or "the weight of chance-desires." George Eliot characters either embrace duty or flounder helplessly by insisting on their own claims. George Eliot may not have been willing to go all the

way with Comte's dogmatic assertion that no one has in any case any right but that of doing his duty⁸² but she comes perilously close to it. Deronda's mother, dying painfully of what is probably cancer, in keeping with the poetic justice so curiously out of place in a novel of such psychological realism,⁸³ cries out passionately, "'I had a right to be free. I had a right to seek my freedom from a bondage that I hated.'" ⁸⁴ But events are against her, or more accurately George Eliot arbitrates against her. The acceptance or rejection of duty, as we have seen, provides a sort of moral barometer, an indicator of a character's moral growth and once we have decided where the characters fit on this finely calibrated scale we can predict broadly if not in detail what will happen to them.

Whether we agree, then, with Maggie's decision to reject Stephen, or feel that Romola sacrifices herself needlessly in her caring for Tessa and Tito's children, or that Deronda's eager embracing of his Jewishness is quixotic or dangerously fanatical, we cannot escape the conclusions that George Eliot puts before us. Given her premises, the conclusions follow inexorably. We are shown no range of alternatives, only the "barrenness of a fastidious egoism ...where a fitful impulse springs here and there conspicuously rank amid the general weediness."⁸⁵

Individualism equals egoism and is suspect, but unfortunately this means that originality, creativity, and eccentricity are likewise suspect. In a later discussion of George Eliot's concept of self, I will examine such characters as Dorothea Brooke, Felix Holt, and Daniel Deronda in order to show that their claims to originality are still closely confined within the "ordinary wirework of social forms."⁸⁶ And, as I indicated earlier, Romola may have achieved moral stature but she is no rebel. She accepts and protects the status quo. In a George Eliot novel, we observe the process of moral growth but the path is

fixed and clearly defined in advance. There is no room for the random or the unexpected. Before, however, we examine this "loss of marginality,"⁸⁷ in David Riesman's phrase, there is one aspect of George Eliot's belief in moral growth which we have not yet discussed. Many of the novels, from Janet's Repentance to Daniel Deronda, illustrate what George Eliot refers to as "the incalculable effect of one personality on another."⁸⁸ Various struggling characters, always women, achieve moral growth as the result of the influence of a character who is more morally sensitive. These "mentor"⁸⁹ characters take on a priestly and confessional role towards their pupils and offer them an ideal picture of themselves towards which they can strive.

Let us now examine George Eliot's treatment of these mentor/pupil relationships.

The Incalculable Effect.

The previous sections examined such concepts as moral development, the nature of the "moral sense," intuitionism, absolutism and duty. I will now look at George Eliot's way of dealing with the individual suffering human being, with the "cry from soul to soul, without other consciousness than their moving with kindred natures in the same embroiled medium, the same troublous fitfully-illuminated life."¹

In the essay on Young already referred to, George Eliot writes that "in proportion as morality is emotional, it will exhibit itself in direct sympathetic feeling and action, and not as the recognition of a rule."² The personal world of human relationships requires "direct sympathetic feeling and action." This phrase could serve as a summary for one particular kind of personal relationship which George Eliot returns to frequently in the novels; this is the mentor/pupil relationship where, as a result of trust and openness between two people, one or both of them achieve moral growth. Esther's changed conception of possibilities in Felix Holt, because of her friendship with Felix is described as "a dissolving view, in which the once-clear images were gradually melted into new forms and new colours....So fast does a little leaven spread within us--so incalculable is the effect of one personality on another."³ The use of the word "incalculable" shows us that we have left behind the world of irreversible laws, of rigorously determined consequences and effects. I am not trying to suggest, however, that George Eliot would have held that the laws did not obtain in such instances, that they had been miraculously suspended in the case of personal relationships. She would have firmly and bravely acknowledged that the laws held as rigorously in this context as in any other, but

that they were too complex to be formulated. But we can detect in her bifocal vision, a return to a more religiously-oriented perspective. With the introduction of a sense of purpose, a goal towards which a person can direct his energies, we have a partial return to Aristotle's disputed "final cause," and a language which is less scientifically precise. J. Hillis Miller analyses the tension arising from "the conflict between the writer's conscious adherence to scientific models, whether those of the physical or of the biological sciences, to describe human life and, on the other hand, his insight into the true nature of that life. Such insight means a recognition that human beings cannot be described in language appropriate for inanimate objects or for organisms." ⁴ He refers explicitly to Adam Bede and Middlemarch and talks of George Eliot's "struggle ...to reconcile her sense of human existence with a language of causality taken from nineteenth century science."

This is obviously a recurring problem. In The Faith of the Counsellors, Paul Halmos discusses the difficulty experienced by twentieth century counsellors in finding a scientific language which adequately expresses the ineffable quality of some counselling situations. They encounter serious problems when they attempt to quantify a qualitative relationship. If, as he indicates, counsellors are but "priests writ large," ⁵ then it is not surprising that scientists should be confused by their own tendency to re-introduce terminology they feel is more suited to a religious context. We must, he cautions, refrain from levelling at them accusations of hypocrisy or double-think, as this problem they have with language, merely reflects the ambiguities of our human situation. We can see the relevance of his comments to George Eliot. He is presenting in different terms the problem outlined by J. Hillis Miller.

I will now look at the terms in which George Eliot presents the very personalised relationships which various of her critics have described as

those of mentor/pupil. They show that some of her characters are priest-counsellors, in Halmos' sense. The relationship between Janet Dempster and the consumptive Evangelical minister, Mr Tryan from the third of George Eliot's Scenes of Clerical Life, Janet's Repentance, is an instance of this kind of relationship. It flowers after Janet's husband has thrown her out of her home in the middle of the night and she is forced to seek refuge from a friend, Mrs Pettifer. She is no longer able to conceal from the world that her marriage is disastrous and this leads her to seek an interview with the previously despised Mr Tryan. She confesses to him her alcoholism and ultimately, with his support and encouragement, is able to overcome it. The important features of this relationship fall under several headings: the character of the mentor, the dynamics of their relationship, and the conclusions it offers as to George Eliot's moral schema. Although this relationship is a paradigm of other similar relationships in the novels, for example, that between Esther Lyon and Felix Holt, and the more carefully wrought account of the relationship between Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda, there are ways in which this relationship between Janet and Mr Tryan is not representative.

One of these is that Mr Tryan is seen to be less remote and more human than the other mentor figures. He confesses his own weaknesses to Janet and his unending remorse for his seduction of Lucy. He admits his continuing spiritual struggles and his sense of his own unworthiness. All this, however, is psychologically valid. Current sociological research into alcoholism reveals that alcoholics have the greatest difficulty in openly admitting the nature of their problem, in "naming" their illness. If Mr Tryan had shown the overweening confidence and certainty of Felix, which verge on the arrogant, or the remote goodness of Deronda, it would have scarcely encouraged Janet to make her confession.

In one other aspect there is a notable difference between Janet

and Esther or Gwendolen. Both of the latter in varying degrees show aspects of egoism which mark their kinship with Rosamond Vincy. Janet's sisterhood, on the other hand, contains such characters as Maggie Tulliver and Romola and Dorothea Brooke who have "early emerged from moral stupidity" ⁶ and have a strong capacity for sympathy. Janet, like them, is morally aware. Her drinking is obviously a weakness but it is shown to be very much a response to a destructive situation.

Apart from these two provisos there are fundamental similarities between the Janet/Mr Tryan relationship and the others, so that we can detect a pattern. George Eliot is emphasising the very personal one-to-one quality of such a relationship. Only within such a framework, when the mentor figure is obeying what Paul Tillich has called the "law of listening love," ⁷ is the pupil able to respond to the atmosphere of trust and openness and talk freely. The empathy manifested by the mentor takes two forms: the acceptance of the individual worth of the pupil and at the same time a recognition of that pupil's potential for growth. The first creates the atmosphere of trust; the second, by presenting an image of what the pupil is able to become, offers a goal or direction towards which she can strive. Any falling short of this goal produces a feeling of shame. This is very clear in the scene in Janet's Repentance when Janet accidentally comes across a bottle of brandy at a time when she is feeling lonely and very vulnerable. Her violent reaction in hurling it to the ground and rushing out to walk the long distance to see Mr Tryan marks the final stage in her cure. Previously, in her self-loathing, she could find no sense of her own personal worth which would motivate her to fight against her addiction. Now the thought of Mr Tryan and what he expects of her, her recognition that he will be bitterly disappointed if she succumbs to temptation give her the necessary strength of mind. His actual presence even is not required.

The important healing quality of confession and the device of presenting a goal in the form of an image of an ideal self are recurring themes in the novels. The first is illustrated in the long prison confession Hetty makes to Dinah in Adam Bede. Openness and confession are symptoms of a readiness for moral growth. Conversely, lack of candour, concealment, self-protectiveness are indications of a character's moral deficiencies. Tito Melema's concealment of his father's existence, Arthur Donnithorne's last minute failure to confide in Mr Irwine and Bulstrode's inability to open out to his wife despite her loving solicitude are all examples of moral decline. *and Maggie's mother P.H.*

The most striking example of the efficacy of the goal of the ideal self occurs in Daniel Deronda. Gwendolen desperately clutches to her, as if it were a talisman, Deronda's belief that she will "live to be one of the best sort of women." ⁸

The importance George Eliot gives to the need for openness between people relates to the fact that to her, moral growth concerns not just the individual and his sense of his own identity but is very much a question of that individual's relationship with his immediate family, his community or even his race. Fellowship is most important and a character's capacity for fellowship reveals his state of moral development and is, as well, a means whereby he can develop morally. The capacity for sympathy serves the same two-fold purpose. A loving, trusting relationship, such as the mentor/pupil relationship, generates an openness which is shown to be a necessary ingredient not just for the mental health and moral growth of the individual but for the moral growth and stability of the community at large.

The goal of the ideal self may be offered by a mentor figure or other respected friend, or occasionally it may be adopted as a workable myth or fantasy by the character herself without any intermediary. Maggie

Tulliver, to a certain extent, and Dorothea Brooke, both morally-inspired heroines, set up their own images of a better self towards which they strive. More usually in George Eliot novels, however, the notion of a better self is carried in the mind of some loved one. George Eliot tells us in Middlemarch that "even much stronger mortals than Fred Vincy hold half their rectitude in the mind of the being they love best. 'The theatre of all my actions is fallen' said an antique personage when his chief friend was dead; and they are fortunate who get a theatre where the audience demands their best." ⁹

Unfortunately the idea that other people have about us may not necessarily be helpful. We have already seen the damaging effect of other people's expectations on a character like Lydgate who was partially defeated by Rosamond's intransigence and by the power of gossip in a community like Middlemarch. Rosamond expects him to play his role in her myth of herself as a woman with a certain class distinction; Middlemarch expects the worst and is too quick to come to a low estimate of Lydgate's actions. Lydgate's anguish at having fallen short of his ideal self is paralleled by Ladislav's recognition that he is sliding into that "pleasureless yielding to the small solicitations of circumstance, which is a commoner history of perdition than any single momentous bargain." ¹⁰ Both Ladislav and Lydgate show the possible moral failure if the goal of the ideal self is not reached, just as the earlier examples of Tito, Arthur, and Bulstrode reveal the moral dangers of concealment and distrust.

In this analysis, George Eliot's debt to Feuerbach becomes clear; his thinking reinforced and confirmed her own thoughts. A brief résumé of Feuerbach's intellectual position will facilitate comparison between his views and George Eliot's.

In 1854, George Eliot translated Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity and allowed it to be published under her own name, Marian Evans. Ludwig Feuerbach was one of those ethical humanists who are especially concerned with "relationship." In common with the more recent existentialist, Marcel, and the two visionaries, one Christian and one Jewish, Kierkegaard and Marcel Buber, Feuerbach insisted on a personal response to other people. He abhorred exploiting other people or abusing them by reification. Commitment to other people and to the natural world was seen by such thinkers as a safeguard against alienation, separation, and distortion.

Feuerbach is especially interesting in that he follows the other Tübingen philosophers, Strauss for example, in demythologising the Bible and the Christian message. The question which preoccupies him about Christianity is not, "Is it true?" but, "What function has it served in mankind's history?" and "What can be learnt from it about men's needs and how they satisfy them?"¹¹ This is a line of questioning which can be traced forward to Freudian and other psychologies. George Eliot expresses a similar view in a letter of 1859.

I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves.... I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity--to the acceptance of any set of doctrine as a creed, and a superhuman revelation of the Unseen--but I see in it the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind, and I have the profoundest interest in the inward life of sincere Christians in all ages.¹²

The philosophic relativism of his approach to religion does not extend to every other area of human thought. Feuerbach, (and here we can recognise a great similarity to George Eliot), may have dethroned the absolutes of religion but he has retained another absolute in his virtual deification of mankind and in his stressing the importance of the individual in the development of morality. The stress on the individual is somewhat ambiguous. The individual who is so important is not the in-

dividual self, the I, but the other individual to whom we relate, the You, of the I-You statement. Without this You we would have no sense of identity. It is here that Feuerbach and George Eliot, while seeming to promulgate an individualistic ethic, are yet very different from

Nietzsche with his passionate individualism and his scorn for what he called "herd mentality."¹³ He stands totally in opposition to fellowship-oriented ethical systems. The section on duty has already examined the identification that often occurs in ethical thought between selfishness and egoism, and the anxiety that surrounds the very word "individualism." In moral terms individualism is seen as an opposition to altruism, in political terms to collectivism. The individualism of Feuerbach, George Eliot, Marcel, Buber and others takes the form of a required respect for the individuality of other people. It relates to the importance of maintaining an I-You relationship with others, not an I-It relationship.

The other factor important in the writings of Feuerbach and Buber, and detectable as well in George Eliot, is that this moral imperative becomes in effect a divine imperative, a religious imperative. The human race is sacred and to be cherished. The attributes of God are meaningless unless they are applied to mankind; qualities of benevolence, justice, and compassion are all human attributes and to apply them to God is to reduce man's stature, to nullify his worth and to give power and dominance over men's minds to an idea. Feuerbach hotly refuted the charge of atheism. To him atheism did not denote a lack of belief in God but a denial of God's attributes, a denial of the reality of benevolence, justice, compassion, and therefore, a denial of mankind. It is not difficult to see how George Eliot steeped in her youth in Christianity, where she found, originally, sanctions for morality, could turn eagerly away from the impersonal, necessity-governed universe of the nineteenth century scientists to embrace a system which enjoined respect for all

creatures, love and tolerance. Similar aspects of Comte's thought also attracted her, but his proselytising and his demands for disciples and incense place him in a different category to Feuerbach who made no such grandiose personal claims. It is not surprising, therefore, that George Eliot should have said that even if Comte was a "great thinker," she found Positivism "one-sided" ¹⁴ or that she could not "submit [her] mind and soul to the guidance of Comte." ¹⁵ While she was engaged in the translation of The Essence of Christianity, she wrote that "with the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree." ¹⁶

Sidney Hook describes the religion of love in terms which show very clearly the attitudes and even the vocabulary George Eliot held in common with Feuerbach. "The religion of love," he maintains, "strengthens the moral relations between men, for the real source of moral relationships is love....Only when social relationships become moral relationships can the oppositions between the egoism of the self and the needs of the species be resolved. And since Feuerbach held that 'all moral relationships are per se religious' although not vice versa, he preached his humanistic religion of love as the most effective agency of moral improvement." ¹⁷ The stress on relationships as opposed to identity is clear. Feuerbach himself writes that "the species is unlimited; the individual alone limited." ¹⁸ The following passage provides a most important abstract of Feuerbach's position and the nature of the relationship that he stressed "between him and another human being."

this other is the representative of the species, even though he is only one, for he supplies to me the want of many others, has for me a universal significance, is the deputy of mankind, in whose name he speaks to me, an isolated individual, so that, when united only with one, I have a participated, a human life;--between me and another human being there is an essential, qualitative distinction. The other is my thou,--the relation being reciprocal,--my alter ego, man objective to me, the revelation of my own nature, the eye seeing itself. In another I first have the consciousness of humanity; through him I first learn, I first feel,

that I am a man: in my love for him it is first clear to me that he belongs to me and I to him, that we two cannot be without each other, that only community constitutes humanity. But, morally, also, there is a qualitative, critical distinction between the I and thou. My fellow-man is my objective conscience; he makes my failings a reproach to me; even when he does not expressly mention them, he is my personified feeling of shame. The consciousness of the moral law, of right, of propriety, of truth itself, is indissolubly united with my consciousness of another than myself. ¹⁹

Once we have decoded Feuerbach's rather abstruse style, we find he is saying some very familiar things. He belongs to the tradition of nineteenth century philosophers and social scientists whom I have already mentioned. He stresses the importance of community-based feelings as the cornerstone of morality, as we see in the phrase "only community constitutes humanity." He emphasises the way in which we discover the measure of ourselves in the implicit or explicit judgement of our neighbours. The parallels between his thought and George Eliot's are immediate and striking; they quite obviously shared the same preoccupations and we can readily understand how she was drawn to translate him. The reinforcement he offered to her ideas was exclusively a moral one. The importance of the other person, the need for fellowship (which, as we have seen, relates to the biological and ecological emphasis on medium) are essential aspects of moral growth. In addition, Feuerbach exerted a considerable influence on the political thought of Marx and Engels who criticised him severely for this very moralistic bias. Engels claims, for example, that "the same Feuerbach who on every page preaches sensuousness, absorption in the concrete, in actuality, becomes thoroughly abstract as soon as he begins to talk of other than mere sex relations between human beings. Of these relations only one aspect appeals to him: morality." ²⁰ Marx and Engels thought Feuerbach was mistaken in seeing all relationships between men as moral relationships; critics of Marx and Engels object to their exclusive emphasis on economic relationships. Nevertheless, George Eliot's own moralistic bias shows her to be closer to the

spirit of Feuerbach than his political followers.

I have already mentioned one other aspect of Feuerbach's thought in connection with the problems of temporary lack of motivation in a character like Deronda. I find it most pertinent to my analysis of George Eliot's thought because it summarises what I have indicated is her tacit re-acceptance of Aristotle's final cause, the goal towards which we direct our activities. Feuerbach writes that

Every man ...must place before himself a God, i.e., an aim, a purpose. The aim is the conscious, voluntary, essential impulse of life, the glance of genius, the focus of self-knowledge,--the unity of the material and the spiritual in the individual man. He who has an aim has a law over him; he does not merely guide himself; he is guided. He who has no aim, has no home, no sanctuary; aimlessness is the greatest unhappiness. Even he who has only common aims gets on better, though he may not be better, than he who has no aim. An aim sets limits; but limits are the mentors of virtue. He who has an aim, an aim which is itself true and essential, has, eo ipso, a religion ... in the sense of reason, in the sense of the universal, the only true love. ²¹

My discussion of the opposition between dilettanteism and duty which is a theme in several of the novels will have already shown George Eliot's concurrence with this statement. One further quotation from Daniel Deronda, a description of Grandcourt points up the lawlessness of this unmotivated, purposeless state and shows clearly the opposition George Eliot saw existing between egoism and duty. She asks in the epigraph to chapter 25, "how trace the why and wherefore in a mind reduced to the barrenness of a fastidious egoism, in which all direct desires are dulled, and have dwindled from motives into a vacillating expectation of motives: a mind made up of moods, where a fitful impulse springs here and there conspicuously rank amid the general weediness? 'Tis a condition apt to befall a life too much at large, unmoulded by the pressure of obligation." ²² Grandcourt has already been described as one who suffers from "the want of regulated channels for the soul to move in--good and sufficient ducts of habit without which our nature

easily turns to mere ooze and mud, and at any pressure yields nothing but a spurt or a puddle." ²³

Many critics have dealt with the undoubted Feuerbachian elements in George Eliot's novels, concentrating especially on the dechristianising of various figures like Mr Tryan from Janet's Repentance. Dinah Morris, the Methodist preacher in Adam Bede, suffers the same fate, and in the later novels, especially Felix Holt and Daniel Deronda, the mentor figure is not even remotely Christian. Felix is a self-declared agnostic and it has been well noted that Deronda's commitment to Judaism is political not religious. Other Feuerbachian influences have been discussed. There is U. C. Knoepfelmacher's notable account of the similarities between the sacrament of the Last Supper and the sacramental offering of bread and wine to Adam Bede to fortify him before he goes to hear Hetty's sentence at court. ²⁴ I am more concerned with patterns of thought than with specific Feuerbachian influences, but I will mention the skillful way in which George Eliot Feuerbachs the explicitly Catholic and mystical message contained in Thomas à Kempis' The Imitation of Christ, before she offers it to Maggie in The Mill on the Floss. The passages Maggie reads from this mediaeval, devotional work have supposedly been marked by an earlier reader, a reader, who, we discover, was undoubtedly a follower of Feuerbach. They do not run consecutively in The Imitation of Christ. Where George Eliot quotes two passages from one section, she leaves out Christian references, especially those telling of "grace," or the "love of God," "immortality," or the "everlasting crown." Thus the directive Maggie finds in Thomas à Kempis tells her to eliminate her self-love and surrender her will and emphatically does not provide an instruction to seek out the love of God. God as a separate entity does not exist in George Eliot's system of beliefs. She believes with Feuerbach that His attributes have been misplaced, that they belong rightfully to man. She

does not totally avoid all references to the suffering Christ but these are in Feuerbachian terms and refer to sufferings of humanity. They thus become a useful symbol for the human predicament.

The patterns of thought George Eliot shared with Feuerbach and the similar emotional resonance of their writings with the reiterated concern for humanity places both of them in a tradition of humanistic ethics. This kind of ethics is intent on propounding the inwardness of an individual's reaction to the world. Donald MacKinnon, contrasting the "act-ethics" of utilitarianism with a humanistic ethic declares that the humanistic ethic defines a man's moral worth in terms of "man's responsiveness," the "disponibility" of a man in the presence of his fellows, the diversity of human love. "Such worth," he claims, "is realized by the extent to which the individual so to speak opens and deepens himself through his relations to his fellows." ²⁵

The mention of "openness" and "responsiveness" confirms the connection I am making between George Eliot's moral position and that of Feuerbach and the other philosophers throughout past centuries who have rejected a "shallow consequentialist morality" ²⁶ and have promulgated a humanistic ethic.

Precepts to People.

Our investigation of George Eliot's conception of morality has led into very divergent fields. We have examined eighteenth century moralists, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume; Balguy and Price; nineteenth century sociologists, biologists and moral philosophers such as Spencer, Bain, Darwin and Lewes; and lastly a German demythologiser of the Bible, Ludwig Feuerbach. These various writers influenced George Eliot, or more accurately, reinforced the tendency of her thought to move in a particular direction. Her concern for moral growth, for fellowship and human sympathy, provides a particular mental coloration which permeates her whole work. We find the same emphasis whether we are examining her belief in "universal causality"¹ or observing the effect on her methods of characterisation of her acceptance of the laws of association psychology or those of evolutionary psychology. We have been inspecting a "web where each mesh [draws] all the rest."²

Up to this point I have been concentrating on isolating and identifying George Eliot's clusters of ideas. But an analysis or description of her psychological and moral assumptions provides no indication of how she has incorporated these assumptions into her novels. It may indicate the parameters of a character's growth or decline but convey no critical assessment of the novelist's success or failure. A knowledge of the relationship between her thought and that of her contemporaries may illuminate the novels in one area but cannot of itself offer an evaluative commentary. To bridge this gap between description and evaluation, it is necessary to examine more specifically the implications of her ideas for the aesthetic completeness of the novels. Thus it is not enough merely to identify George Eliot's moral absolutism or her hierarchical

construct for moral growth. It is also important to decide whether such beliefs constitute limitations and restrictions on the manipulation of plot or theme, or on the development of characters and the sorts of choices offered them.

I will now turn my attention to some of the issues that have emerged from an examination of George Eliot's moral and psychological stance. I will define her concept of self, the ways in which she allows her characters to establish themselves in the world of the novels. I will assess, in terms of the individual, struggling human being, the tragic implications of a framework of universal causality and irreversible laws. Finally I will look at representative characters in order to analyse whether they are allowed sufficient freedom for moral growth or whether they suffer from George Eliot's too-controlling hand.

Let us now examine the ways in which George Eliot defines the selfhood of her characters and the sorts of opportunities she provides for them. We will also need to decide whether these opportunities allow for a free range of expression, or whether they restrict the characters' freedom of choice.

The Concept of Self.

"Strange, that some of us," writes George Eliot in Middlemarch, "with quick alternate vision, see beyond our infatuations, and even while we rave on the heights, behold the wide plain where our persistent self pauses and awaits us." ¹ (my italics) This indication that we have a "persistent self" in addition to the many other references throughout the novels, to "Better selves," ² "Worse selves," ³ "inner selves," ⁴ and "past selves," ⁵ suggests strongly that in George Eliot's view the self is a stable entity. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility of maturing or growing. "Character," after all, as she tells us, "is not cut in marble"; ⁶ it is a "process and an unfolding." ⁷ The embryological image indicates a blueprint for change within certain fixed limits. Describing George Eliot's "stable core of ego," ⁸ W. J. Harvey comments that

Her characters may ask themselves, "Where or why did I go wrong in the past?" But they do not ask the prior questions, "Who was that 'I' which went wrong in the past? How is that 'I' related to the present 'I' which asks the question? How far is the present 'I' responsible for what that totally different past 'I' did?" Of course, this is not to say that George Eliot ...denies the facts of change and development. But change is still reconciled to the idea of a stable ego; one's identity lies precisely in the unique pattern of past changes which constitutes one's individuality. ⁹

This is a far remove from Hume's "bundle" ¹⁰ theory of the self, constantly changing, and given an illusory cohesion only by memory patterns in the mind. Evolutionary psychology emphasised the inheritance of ancestral tendencies and patterns of response (Spencer's "partially-innate preparedness" ¹¹); and my analysis makes it clear that these inherited characteristics were thought of as serving an integrative function. They provided the base line of a triangle; but the angles distended from

that base line and the height of the triangle are determined by complex responses to the circumstances of life. A fragmented, atomistic "bundle" cannot constitute a central core of ego, a "persistent self" which is accountable and responsible for decisions and choices. The all-important possibility of moral growth is dependent on our having a central core of personality.

Hans Meyerhoff, discussing the literary implications of such a view of the self, states that

Man is shown not only as a repository of perceptions and memories, but also and predominantly as a centre of active, self-regulative functions. And it is these functions that serve to convey to the person himself and to the reader that a certain bundle of different experiences exhibits the quality of structure and unity which enables us to say that they belong to the same person. Similarly, the awareness of continuity as an essential ingredient of selfhood is invariably part of the literary portrait. In this connection, the intimate, reciprocal relationship between time and the self becomes most manifest; for the awareness of continuity within the self is correlative with the aspect of continuity or duration in time.¹²

Meyerhoff introduces the concepts of past and memory to show the important part they play in our awareness of our own identity. Emphasis on the importance of the past becomes a significant theme in George Eliot's novels and reveals very clearly the close resemblance of her ideas to Wordsworth's. In her "Brother and Sister Sonnets", she appears to utilise material from her own past excluded from the strongly autobiographical The Mill on the Floss. She speaks explicitly about the integrative nature of past experiences which, (as in Wordsworth,) derive predominantly from natural landscapes.

The wide-arched bridge, the scented elder-flowers,
The wondrous watery rings that died too soon,
The echoes of the quarry, the still hours
With white robe sweeping-on the shadeless noon,
Were but my growing self, are part of me,
My present past, my root of piety.¹³

A similar sentiment is described in The Mill on the Floss after Tom's and Maggie's contented and successful fishing expedition. Specific

references to the children merge into a general discussion of the universal moral value of such early experience. This particular experience is presented to us as typical, not unique. Other important episodes in the life of George Eliot herself or those of her characters are often described as "epochs,"¹⁴ where they serve a strongly baptismal function these epochs closely resemble Wordsworth's "spots of time."

Life did change for Tom and Maggie; and yet they were not wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of these first years would always make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it,--if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lipping to ourselves on the grass--the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows--the same redbreasts that we used to call "God's birds", because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet harmony where everything is known, and loved because it is known?

The wood I walk in on this mild May day, with the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between me and the blue sky, the white star-flowers and the blue-eyed speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet--what grove of tropical palms, what strange ferns or splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill such deep and delicate fibres within me as this home scene? These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky, with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows--such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass today, might be no more than the faint perception of yearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us, and transform our perception into love. ¹⁵ (my italics)

The importance of the past is a recurring motif in other novels.

Early in Daniel Deronda there is a much quoted passage where George Eliot regrets that Gwendolen has not had the opportunity of establishing firm roots in some such spot as Offendene where she and her family have just come to live. As a result her past does not contain any settled memories.

A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early

home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood. 16

The words I have underlined in this and the previous passage from The Mill on the Floss all relate very strongly to what I am calling for convenience in this chapter George Eliot's concept of self. "Habit" refers us back specifically to the laws of association and the explanation they offer of how we come to know the world. In this case, however, it is the inner world, the consciousness of self, that is being built up by means of these affection-laden associations that are described as a "sweet habit of the blood." The circumstances of Gwendolen's girlhood, the lack of permanence and continuity have prevented her from laying up a store of valuable and integrative memories. She has no real sense of the past and this always suggests in George Eliot, no sense of herself. A character's past and his healthy accepting relationship with that past implies, in a George Eliot novel, more than an untroubled conscience. The past provides an awareness of identity and offers a means of making sense out of the welter of experiences that confront us. The pattern of the past suggests a pattern for the future, and provides a moral guideline that protects us from every "wayward choice of [our] own passion." 17 Gwendolen as we follow her painful initiation into moral awareness is handicapped severely by not being well "rooted in some common spot of native land." An earlier heroine, Maggie Tulliver offers a telling contrast.

When the Tullivers go bankrupt and all their furniture is removed by the bailiff, Maggie's poignant cry rings out, "everything is going away from us--the end of our lives will have nothing in it like the beginning." 18 This is the hallmark of Maggie's sense of herself. Her identity is constituted for her by her past and especially by the

people in her past. She sees her moral dilemmas--firstly with Philip and later with Stephen--in terms of faithfulness to an ideal, and that ideal is defined by her past. It is the past that confers a sense of wholeness. The danger that this wholeness may be fragmented (and her sense of her own identity, therefore, threatened) explains Maggie's behaviour towards both these young men. It is this that makes intelligible the following lines about her "past self." Maggie is finding the strength to reject Stephen a second time, a much harder decision now that she has herself tasted the bitterness of almost total rejection and also has to close her heart to Stephen's cry of distress. She has almost written the all-important word: "'Come!'"

But close upon that decisive act, her mind recoiled; and the sense of contradiction with her past self in her moments of strength and clearness, came upon her like a pang of conscious degradation.... She sat quite still, far on into the night: with no impulse to change her attitude, without active force even for the mental act of prayer: only waiting for the light that would surely come again. It came with the memories that no passion could long quench: the long past came back to her, and with it the fountains of self-renouncing pity and affection, of faithfulness and resolve. ¹⁹
(my italics)

An attachment to the past per se would seem totally derisory in this instance; her father is dead, her brother has brutally and ignominiously thrown her out, and the whole of St Ogg's is united to slander her. But a past self which not only provides a sense of continuity and identity, but also protects against any rupturing of that continuity and identity, presents Maggie's decision to us in a different light. This is not a moral decision insulated from her own personal needs; nor does it have to be seen as a "neurotic strategy," ²⁰ as Bernard Paris, for example, has recently described it. George Eliot herself would have maintained that psychological and moral health are indistinguishable.

Accordingly, Gwendolen's lack of "rootedness" is a sign of her psychological and moral precariousness; Maggie's recognition of the close bonds that tie her to her past reveals her psychological and moral

strengths. Gwendolen has not chosen to dispense with a settled past to provide the kind of affectionate bonding George Eliot describes in the Offendene passage; the fact that she has not is one of the "conditions" of her life. And the lack of settled memories means for her no settled direction; she is adrift and aimless, like Deronda himself, though for different reasons. He has had a settled childhood but has not known his parentage. Both of them are "in the midst" ²¹ to borrow Kermode's phrase, but without an adequate relationship to their past they cannot shape their futures. Gwendolen may not see her dilemma in these terms; it is Deronda who offers this as a possible explanation of her problem, and attempts to create in her the awareness of a need of direction. With his own experience of displacement he inevitably sees her situation, as also Mirah's, in terms of his own emotional needs.

If we look briefly at another rootless character, Tito Melema, from Romola, we can learn still more about George Eliot's concept of self in relation to the past. Romola's godfather describes Tito as "one of the demoni"; ²² and certainly in comparison with the rootedness and hereditary bondage of Romola, he introduces a very cosmopolitan flavour. His rootlessness at the beginning of the story, however, is no more his fault or responsibility than Gwendolen's is hers. It is what he does with his lack of a committed past that is his responsibility. And it is shown to be a characteristic related to his refusal to accept the duties involved in any commitment or partisanship. At a dinner party he is described as one who can easily "accept an entire scheme of the universe." ²³ This reveals the facile quality of his mind, its lack of a settled belief. It is akin to the role-playing which is so much part of his nature, his wishing, for example, that he could walk out of his past as if it were but a bundle of rehearsal clothes to be discarded at will. ²⁴ Another aspect of this tendency is his adoption of the role of Florentine spy.

He enjoys the intellectual thrill of politicking, of playing one group off against another because this gives him a sense of power and superiority. His political betrayals cannot even be justified on the grounds that they are a response to a strong partisanship or loyalty. Tito has simply converted his rootlessness, his insufficient relationship with his own past into a political advantage.

I set Gwendolen alongside Maggie to show opposite ends of this moral axis: I could set Will Ladislav alongside Tito as an example of a character who has a similarly displaced childhood but who, after his initial dilettanteism, settles down to a life of service to the community. Under Dorothea's influence and in his desire to deserve her good opinion, Ladislav finds a place for himself and a "duty" to others, which shows him to be of quite different calibre to Tito. Tito acknowledges only the one duty and that is to himself.

In discussing the problem of rootlessness, I have shown that George Eliot distinguishes between two sorts of people. There are those, like Gwendolen or Deronda or Will Ladislav, whose displaced childhoods are no fault of their own and who all, in their different ways, feel the lack of a settled and certain past. Then there is a character like Tito Melema, who consciously exploits his lack of rootedness because such a state provides a freedom from bondage to his fellow creatures and an escape from the ties of duty. Deronda's mother, with her vain attempt to discard her Jewishness, and Hetty Sorrel, whose roots are shallow,²⁵ we are told, notwithstanding her family connections, belong in the same category as Tito, and like him, are judged to be morally reprehensible.

George Eliot relates this question of a character's rootedness both to his psychological and his moral well-being. It is not a matter of depicting psychological health in moral terms or moral strength in

psychological terms; there is no such separation in her mind. What we are examining is an identification between these two aspects of the self.

The character of Silas Marner provides a very explicit illustration of George Eliot's belief that a healthy, accepting relationship with the past is a necessary concomitant of an integrated sense of self. We do not need critical analysis to make us aware of the Wordsworthian flavour of this short novel. George Eliot herself wrote in a letter to Blackwood that she had not expected it to engage anyone's interest but her own "since William Wordsworth [was] dead." ²⁶ The little novel is a blend of fairytale and reality. The story of Godfrey Cass belongs to the world of universal causality, where one action entails another and where "consequences are unpitying"; ²⁷ the story of the weaver in exile, regenerated and reintegrated into the life of the community by the offices of a little orphan girl, is a fairy fantasy, a moral fable of suffering and despair converted into healing and recovery. Silas' rejection by the inmates of Lantern Yard and especially by his trusted friend, William Dene, sends him into a state of exile, "in which the past becomes dreamy because its symbols have all vanished, and the present too is dreamy because it is linked with no memories." ²⁸

His life as an outcast and his miserly obsession with his gold provide him with no links between his past life and his present by means of which he can re-establish his identity. There is a potential but temporary respite when he responds to the needs of Sally Oates and prescribes for her the herbs he had seen his mother take for the same affliction. "In this office of charity, Silas felt, for the first time since he had come to Raveloe, a sense of unity between his past and present life, which might have been the beginning of his rescue from the insect-like existence into which his nature had shrunk." ²⁹ Unfortunately, however, the episode was too ephemeral to break down his neighbours' distrust of

him or his distrust of the whole world.

It is not until the theft of his gold and the arrival of Eppie that he is shaken out of his habitual apathy and total separateness from his neighbours. The need to care for the child, and to establish contacts with his neighbours, especially Dollie Winthrop, restores him. He rediscovers his past life and a sense of continuity between the past and the present. "With reawakening sensibilities, memory also reawakened," and, as a result, "he had begun to ponder over the elements of his old faith, and blend them with his new impressions, till he had recovered a consciousness of unity between his past and present."³⁰ The most explicit description of this occurs when George Eliot is contrasting Eppie's and Silas' growth. She is integrating her personality, laying down the foundations of self; Silas is re-establishing his identity and his selfhood as his memory revives and provides him with the needful sense of continuity between past and present. "As the child's mind was growing into knowledge, his mind was growing into memory; as her life unfolded, his soul, long stupefied in a cold narrow prison, was unfolding too, and trembling gradually into full consciousness."³¹

Silas emerges from his "cold, narrow prison," this state of stupefaction. Hetty Sorrel in an earlier novel is literally in prison, although this, of course, is to be taken symbolically as well. Hetty, we are told, is "sinking helpless in a dark gulf";³² she has reached a state of blind despair where she has become virtually dehumanised. Silas' existence is described as "insect-like";³³ old Mr Transome in Felix Holt is also compared to an insect.³⁴ Hetty has become an "animal that gazes, and gazes, and keeps aloof."³⁵ Silas' sufferings are brought on by an external agency; they express his bewildered reaction to his rejection by those he trusted. Hetty is a partial agent in her own suffering. She may have been deluded by Arthur's charm, but her

vanity and her longing for social status are also factors in her downfall. Yet we feel that with the "trivial soul" ³⁶ George Eliot has given her, she is made to endure too much. The account of her wanderings in the chapter called "The Journey in Despair" ends with a rhetorical question, "What will be the end?--the end of her objectless wandering, apart from all love, caring for human beings only through her pride, clinging to life only as the hunted wounded brute clings to it?" ³⁷ This question mainly describes Hetty's situation in realistic terms and emphasises her extreme suffering. But moral emphasis is not lacking. The comments that she cares for others only through her pride and that she has an anxious desire not to lose face remind us of earlier remarks about her lack of feeling for the family who have brought her up as a daughter, and her indifference to her young cousins. George Eliot has told us that she has shallow roots. ³⁸ The severance of Silas' roots almost destroys his human personality. Hetty, likewise, loses human stature. She is compared to a "brute" ³⁹ or an "animal" ⁴⁰ but it is she herself who has discarded her roots.

In various ways, then, the importance of the past and of the character's relationship with that past enters into all George Eliot's novels as a constituent of selfhood. Alienation from one's fellows leads to a breakdown of mental stability and is a depersonalising, dehumanising condition. Health is restored or stability is maintained by the acceptance of a bondage and a duty towards one's fellow creatures. If the self is defined in such social terms, it is inevitable that it will be presented within moral boundaries; moral and psychological functions are seen as inseparable in the total functioning of the self.

Ian Watt sets George Eliot firmly in the tradition of Puritan writers with their intense moral preoccupations. Such writers as Defoe, Richardson, George Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence, he claims,

inherited of Puritanism everything except its religious faith. They all had an intensively active conception of life as a continuous moral and social struggle; they all see every event in ordinary life as proposing an intrinsically moral issue on which reason and conscience must be exerted to the full before right action is possible; they all seek by introspection and observation to build their own personal scheme of moral certainty....⁴¹

For these writers, life is a moral continuum. In similar terms Jerome

Thale describes what goes on in a George Eliot novel. "The moral process

she deals with can be described as choosing one's life." She saw that

"character can come to terms with itself only through action with the outer world....In this search for personal identity, character and

society come together."⁴² Society provides a frame, a focussing; characters within a George Eliot novel seek to define and discover themselves within a social dimension. Rejection of society or rejection of the past are equally symptoms of moral laxity.

It is interesting to examine the so-called rebels of George Eliot's novels for the light their choices and decisions can throw on George Eliot's concept of self. Let us now look at those characters with the most claim to originality or even eccentricity in their responses to life in order to discover whether George Eliot allows them a wider range of possibilities.

The three most original women are Renola, Dorothea Brooke and Catherine Arrowpoint. In an earlier analysis, I indicated that Renola achieves moral stature and frees herself from a false dependence on other's guidance. She even grapples with the frightening problem of rebellion against what is generally considered right; she recognises in herself the rigidity that other righteous egoists, Adam Bede, for example, also have to overcome. She now sees herself and the events of the past in a very clear light. But what does she actually choose to do? She decides to return to Florence in case her husband still needs her. This self-sacrifice is akin to Dorothea's decision to accept the unknown

duty that Casaubon seeks to impose on her. Both Romola and Dorothea have the same merciful release. As Calvin Bedient says, the unregenerate egoists conveniently die.⁴³ Since Tito's death has already been reported, we know that Romola will at least be spared the necessity of a continuing relationship with him. However, we are not prepared for her to adopt Tessa and the children; certainly it would not have seemed out of character for her to have provided them with an annuity. She could then have made some life of her own. But from the novel's Epilogue, it is obvious that Romola is leading a tranquil domestic life looking after these three as well as her elderly and foolish cousin, Monna Brigida. She has education, independence and youth but her own free choice is to remain quietly at home caring for her adopted family. The freedom of mind she has achieved as a result of her suffering has not suggested to her any new or unexpected opportunity, nor does the novel provide any real alternative.

There is not a great deal more to say when we come to Dorothea. All the youthful plans she has for using her money wisely and charitably come to nothing. And although she takes the outrageous step of marrying out of her class in wedding Will Ladislaw, her subsequent life is spent in encouraging his political career and looking after their children. We are told that

Dorothea could have liked nothing better, since wrongs existed, than that her husband should be in the thick of a struggle against them, and that she should give him wifely help. Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done-- not even Sir James Chettam, who went no further than the negative prescription that she ought not to have married Will Ladislaw.⁴⁴

It would certainly be difficult for us, without re-writing the novel, to devise some occupation for Dorothea that would adequately extend her; within the framework of social pressures depicted in Middlemarch, there

are undoubtedly few opportunities. If, as George Eliot insists, "there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it,"⁴⁵ and if what lies outside it in this case is "an imperfect social state,"⁴⁶ then we can accept that "a new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's burial."⁴⁷ But if we are to accept this conclusion, we are required also to accept the first premises: the interdependence of character and environment, and the insufficiency of that environment as a medium for heroic deeds. And even if we accept these premises, it is still noticeable that the two examples George Eliot offers us, St Theresaⁱ and Antigone, are both described in social terms. They are serving what they feel are the needs of their respective communities, not developing their potential for its own sake. An "imperfect state" by that token would surely offer ample opportunity for beneficent activity. We have only to think of Florence Nightingale and other women social reformers in George Eliot's timeⁱⁱ to recognise that George Eliot has deliberately presented to us a situation where Dorothea's opportunities are narrowed to two possibilities. She can either stay at home at Lowick and pursue a rather vacuous social and charitable round or she can marry Will Ladislaw, care for their children, and support his political objectives. We may well feel that Dorothea is wasted, that her life presents a "[sad] sacrifice";⁴⁸ but we must not

ⁱ George Eliot leaves out the indisputable fact that her mission was union with God and that she accepted reluctantly the conventual reform enjoined on her as a duty and a discipline by her spiritual father, John of the Cross.

ⁱⁱ Octavia Hill, for example, was the sister of Lewes' daughter-in-law, Gertrude.

ignore the fact that we have only the one set of alternatives. Dorothea is regarded as unconventional and daring in marrying a man whose genealogy is as confused as Ladislav's; unless we are very much on our guard, we find ourselves accepting George Eliot's presentation of the possibilities which confront Dorothea and we do not recognise the sleight-of-hand involved. Given the available choices, Dorothea is undoubtedly rebellious when she decides to discard her fortune to marry Will, but in a wider context than the novel such rebelliousness surely does not count for much.

The third rebellious character, Catherine Arrowpoint in Daniel Deronda, has an amusing interview with her outraged parents when she tells them she is going to marry Herr Klesmer. They had fully expected her to sacrifice herself by marrying some impecunious, but high-ranking gentleman. Informed by her mother that it is her duty "to place a great property in the right hands," she answers tartly that "people can easily take the sacred word duty as a name for what they desire any one else to do."⁴⁹ It is a sentiment that we might well wish other of George Eliot's heroines had been able to utter. But Catherine is not a protagonist. Her function in the novel is to provide a foil to Gwendolen. Their respective attitudes to music, for example, are contrasted. Catherine's character shows strength and integrity and her approach to the sacred world of art is a mark of her moral worth. A fine musician, she would never have contemplated using her music as a mere means of earning money as Gwendolen does. The scene I have just referred to, shows her choosing comparative poverty for the sake of love. Gwendolen will shortly accept a loveless but wealthy marriage. But Catherine is a static character of little account in her own self and appears only in explicitly patterning episodes. Therefore, it is safe to entrust such a subversive speech to her. Besides, her parents' expectations of her

are treated with such irony that her dismissal of the claims of duty becomes less significant. Her act of rebellion in the end amounts to no more than this momentary defiance of her parents' wishes. Faced with the problem of where to leave their vast fortune if they disinherit their only child, they pragmatically decide to accept the marriage after all. Catherine marries a notable musician who is quite able to support her, even without her fortune, and devotes the rest of her life to him and his music.

This survey of these three so-called rebellious woman characters reveals a clearly repeating pattern. Not one of them seeks a life of her own. The only woman to do so, Deronda's mother Alcharisi is punished remorselessly. She gives up her career as a singer because she believes her voice is going; she has some painful terminal illness--probably cancer--and is haunted by superstitious guilt for her concealment of her son's Jewish birth. The others give up any claims of their own in order to devote themselves to caring for others, and in the end their acts of rebellion can be seen to be negligible.

If this is the fate of the women rebels, what opportunities does George Eliot offer to her male rebels, Felix Holt and Daniel Deronda? **Felix decides to give up his white-collar job and reject the path** of upward mobility for which his education has fitted him. This decision is shown as a commitment to his own class and a passionate desire on his part to improve the conditions of that class which he feels he can best do if he identifies himself with their interests and preoccupations. The novel contains a choric disapproval of his intentions and the strongest dissentient voice is that of his querulous and disappointed mother. But the thing is, of course, that his education and intelligence, his pedagogic passion, all set him outside the class he feels he belongs to. He may dress the same and do the same work but privilege consists in more

than work and money. The very fact that he can choose to remain poor, that there is another kind of life available to him (which he has decided to reject) places him in opposition to those of his own class who cannot make such choices. His supposed eccentricity has to be seen against his political views which are reactionary, authoritarian, and paternalistic. His electioneering speech against the widening of the suffrage until everyone is deserving of the vote reveals that he fully shares his creator's distrust of democracy. The sanctimonious "Address to Working Men by Felix Holt" contains more of the same sentiments. Ignorant self-seeking voters are a threat to the well-being of the state. "The nature of things in this world has been determined for us beforehand," he declares, "and in such a way that no ship can be expected to sail well on a difficult voyage, and reach the right port, unless it is well manned: the nature of the winds and the waves, of the timbers, the sails and the cordage, will not accommodate itself to drunken, mutinous sailors." ⁵⁰ We must not imagine, therefore, that Felix is actually achieving anything new or original; he is preaching resignation and co-operation.

Deronda's break with his Etonian-, Oxonian-educated world is presented as entirely justified; the upper middle-class society we are shown in this novel is tedious and artificial. Deronda feels that the sorts of professions open to him, politics or law, for example, are insufficiently demanding. He is secretly seeking some quest, some romantic challenge. It comes in the form of a duty laid on him by his wholehearted acceptance of his Jewishness and his resolve to follow faithfully the trail that Ezra started. He sets out for the Middle East. There is no ironic reporting of Deronda's decision; it occurs near the end of the book and we do not even have the choric disapproval and ribaldry that is accorded, by unimaginative characters certainly, to

Felix's decision to embrace the cause of the working class. Deronda sets out with the full weight of his author's approval and as I have shown with Dorothea, unless we are careful, we find ourselves accepting too uncritically the terms in which George Eliot presents her characters' choices. In this case we may tend to forget that when Deronda sets out to slay dragons he is far from penniless; he is provided with a gentleman's annuity and a tender, submissive wife to administer to his needs.

In Individualism Reconsidered, David Riesman bemoans the loss from life of what he calls "marginality," which includes possibilities of originality and creativity, as well as the capacity to stand somewhat outside the existing systems and redesign them. In discussing the shifting balance between what he terms "inner-direction" and "other-direction," he writes that

no ideology, however noble, can justify the sacrifice of an individual to the needs of the group. Wherever this occurs, it is the starkest tragedy, hardly less so if the individual consents (because he accepts the ideology) to the instrumental use of himself.... Sometimes the point is pushed to the virtual denial of individuality: since we arise in society, it is assumed with a ferocious determinism that we can never transcend it. All such concepts are useful correctives of an earlier solipsism. But if they are extended to hold that conformity with society is not only a necessity but also a duty, they destroy that margin of freedom which gives life its savour and its endless possibility for advance. ⁵¹

In defining her characters in moral terms, stressing relationship as opposed to identity, George Eliot effectively limits the "margin of freedom" that Riesman is talking about. Her characters undoubtedly accept the instrumental use of themselves. They define themselves, choose their own lives, as Jerome Thale puts it, ⁵² in ways that are in conformity with an idea of universal, social good. Hence the three women, Romola, Dorothea, and Catherine, can find no greater area of self-definition than in the quiet domestic world of caring for others and especially for children. They are not constrained by social pressures

to do this; they willingly and freely choose. And the two men who choose somewhat unusual life-styles, manifest, for all that, a very limited marginality. Political conservatism or gradualism on the one hand and a well-heeled expedition to the Middle East on the other, do not constitute any drastic eccentricity. The evolutionary typology I quoted earlier from Morris Ginsberg's Evolution and Progress gives, as an example of a more evolved person, one who has "more control over and greater independence from the environment."⁵³ A moral absolute that defines the self in terms of relationship, that defines psychic well-being in moralistic terms, does not constitute an environment where such evolved persons can test themselves. We seem to have been offered freedom, but it turns out on a closer analysis to be a very limited freedom. George Eliot characters are constrained and bound within the causal patterning of the universe, by the laws of association that govern the way in which they build up their knowledge of the world and their knowledge of themselves; they are hemmed in and thwarted by the pressures of their environment and whatever conditions it offers for growth and change; they carry an hereditary weight, a burden of facticity which is not just a question of sex and age but governs their free choices within their particular environment by "fixing" in their nervous systems ancestral responses. And lastly they are defined morally in such a way that they can never see themselves as acting in isolation. Separatism is lethal; those few who advocate it in George Eliot's novels always draw down on themselves the all-pervasive moral condemnation meted out to those who do not conform for the good of society.

This reduction of the individual's claims for the good of society is not merely a feature of George Eliot's novels. It pervades nineteenth century social and moral thinking. Calvin Bedient strongly contends that

In George Eliot's world, submission can be made sweet by affection and easy by dullness. But the intelligent and passionate--those

who have selves to lose--are put upon the cross. Their misfortune is that they know and feel that their life has become "a long suicide." George Eliot bore no brief for the extraordinary nature--for individuals like herself....Of course it was not an individual invention: it was the aberration of the age. George Eliot's distinction lay not so much in devising it as in coloring and shaping it against the contours of everyday life, in demonstrating its glory through the medium of narrative.⁵⁴

A partial explanation of how this surrender of personal freedom came to be the aberration of a whole age is offered by W. E. Houghton in The Victorian Frame of Mind. He also suggests an interesting distinction between nineteenth century morality-slanted psychology and twentieth century amoral psychology. He maintains that "the inner life of Christian discipline is the clue to another Victorian phenomenon which now seems so strange, the endless concern with self-improvement. Modern psychology has led us to focus on what we are, not what we should be; and the collapse of the religious tradition with its fixed principles of right and wrong has left us looking rather for a basis than a ceiling for our lives."⁵⁵

We can see the differing emphasis between what we are and what we should be in the possible interpretation of a striking general comment in Middlemarch. It emerges from an appraisal of Lydgate's failure to override Rosamond's will. George Eliot writes that "it always remains true that if we had been greater, circumstance would have been less strong against us."⁵⁶ The greatness George Eliot feels that Lydgate needs, in order to surmount the strength of the circumstances ranged against him, is not the greatness of an autonomous self-realised individual. It is a greatness that requires him to understand himself and his own limitations as well as the environment that both sustains and restricts him. In the context of George Eliot's moralistic conception of the self, his failure in greatness signals a failure in moral worth. But taken out of the context of the novel and interpreted in the light

of more recent psychological theories of individuation (Jung), self-actualisation (Maslow), or learning to be free (Carl Rogers), this statement of George Eliot could serve as a warning against loss of autonomy and a submergence in the banal. Greatness in these terms is not the achieving of fame or notoriety but is defined as a capacity to keep on striving (in the Goethean sense celebrated in the character of Faust). It expresses the refusal to be at the beck and call of countless small and trivial circumstances, the refusal to accept anonymity and mediocrity. But such an apotheosis of psychic strength, of the separate individuality of her characters is not for George Eliot. Calvin Bedient suggests something of the sort when he says that "it was in morality that George Eliot believed; [of life itself] in the sense of spontaneous self-expression she was shudderingly skeptical."⁵⁷ We are left regretting, therefore, that the possibilities she offers us of selfhood are so one-sided and reductionist. Service, submission, duty; these are the watchwords of her novels. The self is defined and revealed to us only through relationship; identity as identity is morally suspect and therefore the novels contain no situations which lead to the glorification of individuality for its own sake. The kind of moral absolute discussed in the chapter on moral development operates strongly here.

George Eliot's conception of the self is undeniably authoritarian. She allows her characters only a limited range of possibilities, and exerts inflexible control over their freedom to do anything original. Her "struggling erring human beings"⁵⁸ are constrained by a moral absolute. In addition, they have to submit to the inexorable laws, the "hard non-moral outward conditions."⁵⁹ What effect do such preoccupations have on George Eliot's narrative technique? Let us now discuss the "binocular vision"⁶⁰ which results from George Eliot's need to show both the individual characters and the inexorable forces ranged against them.

Objective:Subjective.

One might as well hope to dissect one's own body and be merry in doing it, as take molecular physics (in which you must banish from your field of view what is specifically human) to be your dominant guide, your determiner of motives, in what is solely human. That every study has its bearing on every other is true; but pain and relief, love and sorrow, have their peculiar history which make an experience and knowledge over and above the swing of atoms. ¹

This statement occurs in a letter George Eliot wrote to Mrs Ponsonby in 1874 and provides a very succinct account of the opposition she saw between two different ways of viewing the world. I have called this chapter "objective:subjective" but I could equally have said public:private, scientific:poetic, or general:individual. As D. H. Lawrence said, there are "two ways of knowing for man ...knowing in terms of apartness, which is mental, rational, scientific, and knowing in terms of togetherness, which is religious and poetic." ² The tension generated by such an opposition, which can lead to "a tormenting inner conflict ...between the two systems of value" ³ is very much a feature of the complexity of George Eliot's moral and intellectual schema. Her desire to reconcile the possibility of "willing to will strongly" ⁴ with a view of the world which accepts "universal causality" ⁵ --man "in subjection to the external world, though ...also to a certain extent control[ling] it" ⁶ -- represents one such tension. Another lies in her seeking for her characters an opportunity to preserve a measure of individuality at the same time as they are asked to see themselves as an "insignificant part of a divinely-guided whole." ⁷ Such paradoxes or unresolved or unresolvable opposites do not vitiate the novels; we do not feel seriously tempted to accuse George Eliot of hypocrisy or double-think. Rather, they generate a fruitful tension and by leading George Eliot frequently

to alter perspective on her characters, are the main source of dramatic irony. Very skilful balance is necessary, however, if this tension is to be maintained. Occasionally George Eliot loses her narrative control and then we have either a too schematic, undigested novel like Romola, or moments of emotional identification with her characters, which critics like F. R. Leavis complain of so bitterly in her treatment of Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke.

I intend to approach this problem in three different ways. The first will briefly recapitulate George Eliot's system of beliefs and show how they provide a metaphoric frame, as well as a point of reference in our identification of the moral worth of individual characters. The second deals with whether or not George Eliot's novels can be accurately described as tragic, which leads to a discussion of the melancholy resonances that emanate from her whole work. The final section discusses the narrative implications of her "binocular vision"⁸ and examines the structural correlatives of her shifting points of view, her ironic tone, and her handling of aesthetic distance.

Metaphoric Frame.

The world that George Eliot portrays in her novels is determined and bound by a universal causality. What freedom there is, consists in an adjustment of attitude and in an acceptance of the hard necessity laid upon us. It is our responsibility to find within the strict laws of antecedent and consequent narrow loopholes through which it is possible to co-operate with those same laws, and thus manipulate them to our advantage. It is instructive to compare this situation, as George Eliot describes it, with the example of the dog chained to the moving chariot, a favourite analogy used by Stoic philosophers to illustrate their understanding of the position of man in the universe. As the chariot moves, the dog can either resist and be dragged against his will or he can accept the inevitable, consent, and thus appear to run with the chariot of his own free will. For both the dog and for man, it is a question of adopting the right attitude. One aspect of morality for George Eliot is the capacity to recognise the reality of forces in the world, and to be able to co-operate with such ^{forces} as further human progress even at the cost of sacrifice to ourselves. This means learning not to waste valuable time and energy struggling to change what cannot be changed. Knowledge of self is a correlative of knowledge of the world, as my analysis of Lydgate and his moral failure has indicated. Ignorance of the laws is no excuse or protection as transpires very blatantly in the story of Gwendolen Harleth who, in fact, is the "single lot" of the following quotation. It is her "mistaken soul" which is being precipitated on destruction. "And looking at life parcel-wise," George Eliot asks us, "in the growth of a single lot, who having a practised vision may not see that ignorance of the true bond between events, and false

conceit of means whereby sequences may be compelled ...precipitates the mistaken soul on destruction?"¹

Gwendolen's determination to be free of the petty restraints that bind the people she sees about her is frequently presented to us within the ironic frame of her general ignorance of the world and its conditions, as in the following comment of her conception of the marriage state. "For what could not a woman do when she was married, if she knew how to assert herself? Here all was constructive imagination. Gwendolen had about as accurate a conception of marriage--that is to say, of the mutual influences, demands, duties of man and woman in the state of matrimony--as she had of magnetic currents and the law of storms."²

As Gwendolen's moral education progresses her "ignorance of the true bond between events" and her "false conceit of means whereby sequences may be compelled" are presented less ironically. Her mistaken belief that the world is ordered for her convenience is still contrasted with the actuality of a world governed by universal laws; there is the same metaphoric frame, but her sufferings now call forth the compassion of her creator. For instance, the final description of her distress when she realises she has lost Deronda, that they inhabit totally different mental spaces, is couched in terms which emphasise the pathos of her ignorance. Her sense of loss is presented as an awareness of her own insignificance and powerlessness and a corresponding awareness of the immensity of the world, which "seemed getting larger round poor Gwendolen, and she more solitary and helpless in the midst....She was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving."³ We need to remember an earlier comment about Gwendolen if we are to feel the full pathos of this de-

scription. Soon after our introduction to her we have been told that "solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself." ⁴

Whether it is presented ironically or with pathos, Gwendolen's failure to "know" the world is still shown to be a moral one. Thus when we read that she has "no permanent consciousness of other fetters, or of more spiritual restraints," ⁵ our notion of her moral flippancy is reinforced. On the one side is the confused, ignorant individual and on the other, the inexorability of the "hard unaccommodating Actual." ⁶ Only those George Eliot characters who are able to make a realistic appraisal both of themselves and of the forces ranged against them show true moral worth. There is no escaping the stringency of this message; it is reiterated in novel after novel.

Gwendolen is presented with irony and later with compassion. More frequently a character's failure to see clearly is a major source of dramatic irony, a valuable source of tension in the novels between what is the case and what a character hopes is the case. The more generalised perspective we are given on a character enables us to see what he cannot: the reality of the situation in the external world to which he is blind, and the mauvaise foi by which he tries to convince himself that he is behaving honourably. George Eliot is masterly in her analysis of such bad faith, "the twists and turns of the corrupted self as it seeks to evade truth and responsibility." ⁷

Arthur Donnithorne's meditations about Hetty at the beginning of their affair provide a striking example of how the exposure of bad faith generates irony. Arthur recognises fully the dangers of continuing this relationship and sensibly resolves that "he must not see her alone again; he must keep out of her way." ⁸ We then follow the convolutions of his

thought processes as, feeling secure in his mind after taking this resolution, he then allows himself to fantasise about future, forbidden meetings with Hetty.

The soft air did not help his resolutions, as he leaned out and looked into the leafy distance. But he considered his resolution sufficiently fixed: there was no need to debate with himself any longer. He had made up his mind not to meet Hetty again; and now he might give himself up to thinking how immensely agreeable it would be if circumstances were different--how pleasant it would have been to meet her this evening as she came back, and put his arm around her again and look into her sweet face. He wondered if the dear little thing were thinking of him too--twenty to one she was. How beautiful her eyes were with the tear on their lashes! He would like to satisfy his soul for a day with looking at them, and he must see her again. ⁹

This is a very successful account of the behaviour of a weak-willed man under extreme temptation and presents no jarring false note. However, in other parts of Adam Bede, George Eliot is not always so sure of her narrative technique. When she turns directly to the reader with, "Are you inclined to ask whether this can be the same Arthur?" ¹⁰ we become aware of an instability in her relation to her characters, a certain stridency of effect. Discussing this failure of balance in Adam Bede, Laurence Lerner comments that "to expose self-deception is to point out an incongruity: between true and false versions of the world or the self, between what is seen and what is. In Adam Bede George Eliot shows one-half of the incongruity (what is seen) with consummate skill....The failure comes in her rendering of the other half; for she sometimes tells us what is, at effusive, even embarrassing length, and with a frequent betrayal of uncertainty." ¹¹

By the time she came to write Romola, however, George Eliot had gained considerably in assurance and the ironic presentation of the dissonance between what Tito thinks is the case and what actually is the case, betrays no such uncertainty. In fact, his stubborn belief that he is in control of circumstances is presented to us as a symptom of his moral deterioration. His view of himself and of his possibilities

for effective action is distorted by his egoism; he persistently thinks of himself as a free agent, able to control and manipulate circumstances to his own ends. But, far from achieving a greater measure of freedom, he is effectively binding himself tighter and tighter. The steel waistcoat he wears concealed under his jacket to guard himself against unexpected attack is but the external manifestation of the straitjacket of fear he carries within him; the "undying habit of fear" ¹² as George Eliot describes it.

George Eliot handles this opposition between reality and the distorted view of reality produced by the solipsistic, egoistic assumptions of her characters with increasing skill. She explains in Middlemarch that the distorted view is caused by the "speck of self" ¹³ and we can see such a speck of self operating in Lydgate's attempt to reassess the part he played in voting for Tyke.

He was really uncertain whether Tyke were not the more suitable candidate, and yet his consciousness told him that if he had been quite free from indirect bias he should have voted for Mr Farebrother. The affair of the chaplaincy remained a sore point in his memory as a case in which this petty medium of Middlemarch had been too strong for him....So the Rev. Walter Tyke became chaplain to the Infirmary, and Lydgate continued to work with Mr Bulstrode. ¹⁴ (my italics)

The clause I have underlined shows the self-interest which, in fact, motivates Lydgate's choice, for all its apparent impulsiveness. The word "petty" shows his actual attitude towards Middlemarch, and reveals unarguably one aspect of Lydgate's "spots of commonness," ¹⁵ his arrogance. In the discussion of Lydgate in the chapter on determinism, I indicated how far this arrogance contributed to his moral decline by preventing him from making a realistic assessment either of himself or of the environmental pressures on him.

These various examples show George Eliot's metaphoric use of the "hard non-moral outward conditions." ¹⁶ They provide a frame and a point of reference for her novels. Scientific allusions, laws, sequences

and so on, all establish the inexorable causality of her deterministic world. Against their background we have the struggles, conveyed mostly ironically, but sometimes with compassion, of individual human beings who have to come to terms with this inescapable reality. By indicating a character's relationship with these laws, George Eliot can provide the reader, most economically, with information about that character's moral stature and how far his egoism blinds him to the reality of the external world. Sympathy is the all-important affective component of morality; right seeing--in the sense of clearly recognising what laws are modifiable and which are not--is the cognitive component.

Tragedy.

George Eliot's novels present us with the suffering of individual human beings as they struggle to come to terms with the "hard unaccommodating Actual which has never consulted our taste and is entirely unselect."¹ This would seem to offer a blueprint for tragedy in the opposition it suggests between individual insignificance and the vast, impersonal, law-governed forces of the world. A. N. Whitehead, discussing modern science, refers to the "vision of fate" held by the Greek dramatists. He claims that it is this same vision, "remorseless and indifferent, urging a tragic incident to its inevitable issue" that is possessed by science. "Fate in Greek tragedy," he maintains, "becomes the order of nature in modern thought."² George Eliot develops the same idea in her "Notes on The Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy in general". "Our determination as to the right," she claims, "would consist in an adjustment of our individual needs to the dire necessities of our lot, partly as to our natural constitution, partly as sharers of life with our fellow-beings. Tragedy consists in the terrible difficulty of this adjustment."³ She analyses "the good tragic subject" which

to be really tragic ... must represent irreparable collision between the individual and the general....It is the individual with which we sympathise, and the general of which we recognise the irresistible power....A tragedy has not to expound why the individual must give way to the general: it has to show that it is compelled to give way, the tragedy consisting in the struggle involved, and often in the entirely calamitous issue in spite of a grand submission.⁴

Does this "irresistible power" of the general, which, as I have said, constitutes a metaphoric frame for the novels, operate in such a way that we can meaningfully describe them as tragedies? Two separate discussions of the nature of tragedy indicate pertinent objections against

such a description. The first of these relates to the problem of determinism and the allowance of freedom required by the protagonists in a tragedy. Donald MacKinnon talks of the "intractable surd element in the scheme of things, a destiny which shapes the history of an Electra, a Hamlet, a Phèdre, which is their ineluctable inheritance." He concludes that

Even where Racine's explorations of derangement and bewilderment are concerned it is impossible to avoid seeing in his work [or in that of Sophocles or Shakespeare] a paradoxical affirmation at once of human freedom and of an irresistible element in the scheme of things that brings even the most steadfast moral fidelity to nought. No determinist could write an effective tragedy, could achieve the sort of deep exploration of responsibility, justice, guilt, that we find for instance in Electra or in Hamlet. Both Sophocles and Shakespeare take for granted, even if they do not explicitly admit the fact, the reality of a "freedom of open possibilities". 5

MacKinnon's "intractable surd element in the scheme of things" is undoubtedly George Eliot's "irresistible power." But the determinist strain of her thought would have kept her from admitting "the reality of a 'freedom of open possibilities.'" The tragic collision between the individual and the general is a continuing element in her novels. At the same time the moral absolutes which govern her thinking preclude the freedom MacKinnon is talking about. What freedom she does allow is minimal and consists more in the adoption of a realistic attitude towards the world than in any real possibility of action, although she totally rejects the nihilism that regards all effort as useless. The moral worth and the moral benefit are all in the trying even if the results are insignificant or pitifully slow. She herself writes of the piety inherent in "loving, willing submission, and heroic Promethean effort towards high possibilities." 6 George Eliot's possibilities are for moral action, not the "freedom of open possibilities" MacKinnon is referring to.

George Eliot enjoins submission on her characters. No George Eliot novel contains the splendid defiance which characterises Anouilh's

Antigone, for instance, where the heroine refuses to submit. The protagonists of the greatest tragedies may be reduced by the dire hand of necessity but they do not consent to their reduction. An explanation of why they continue to fight, however uselessly, against their lots is offered by George Steiner who writes that there is in tragedy "a wildness and a refusal running against the grain of middle-class sensibility. Tragedy," he maintains, "springs from outrage; it protests against the conditions of life. It carries with it the possibilities of disorder, for all tragic poets have something of the rebelliousness of Antigone." ⁷

If freedom and rebelliousness, as MacKinnon and Steiner suggest, are constituents of tragedy, then George Eliot's novels do not deserve such a title. But this is not to deny the undoubted tragic elements of many of the novels. Gwendolen Harleth's story contains the possibility of tragic rebelliousness. But Gwendolen is purged of her defiance. Her protest against the conditions of her life is shown as evidence of her "moral stupidity"; ⁸ her final resignation, her state of "peaceful melancholy" ⁹ is proof of her moral growth. There is tragedy as well in Hetty Sorrel's bewildered journey. The intellectual and moral failures in Middlemarch, show a tragic waste of potential which many contemporary readers found deeply depressing. This is reminiscent of the distinction between the "painful" and the "tragic" offered by Matthew Arnold. The "painful" in his terms, is where there is "everything to be endured, nothing to be done." ¹⁰

George Eliot's novels may not be tragedies, but they undoubtedly give off a melancholy resonance. She did not regard herself as a pessimist, preferring the description, meliorist. ¹¹ However, her gradualism and her insistence on the inexorability of consequences produce a very dispiriting view of human possibilities. It is not, therefore, difficult to understand how, having lost her Evangelical faith, she came to

accept the Positivistic faith in irreversible laws. Neither an implacable deity nor a rigid set of laws provides much leeway for the individual. G. M. Young attributes the power of Evangelicalism to "its rigorous logic, the 'eternal microscope' with which it pursued its argument into the recesses of the heart, and the details of daily life, giving to every action its individual value in this life, and its eternal consequence in the next."¹² The "eternal microscope" he refers to produces an anxious, introspective analysis of all thoughts, attitudes, and actions which, while it was no doubt excellent training for a potential novelist, was scarcely conducive to optimism. George Eliot's schooldays were imbued with the strict Calvinism of her teachers, the Misses Franklin, and not even the more sanguine beliefs of her Methodist aunt and uncle could temper such a gloomy religious background. George Eliot's own description of her feeling once she had rejected her early Christian beliefs shows her immense gratitude for a release from the "wretched giant's bed of dogmas" on which her soul had been "racked and stretched ever since it began to think."¹³ Offering a clear indictment of the oppressive nature of Evangelicalism, she writes of her

inexpressible relief to be freed from the apprehension ...that at each moment I tread on chords that will vibrate for weal or woe to all eternity. I could shed tears of joy to believe that in this lovely world I may lie on the grass and ruminate on possibilities without dreading lest my conclusions should be everlastingly fatal.¹⁴

There is no mistaking the emotional consonance between Evangelicalism and a Positivistic faith in the "consequences of deeds."¹⁵ The "solvent of feeling"¹⁶ described in Romola if we are to be receptive to new ideas is obviously the sense of "individual nothingness"¹⁷ in the face of forces beyond our control. Science, as U. C. Knoepfelmacher claims, may have removed the Calvinist deity, but it allowed "George Eliot--and fellow Puritan renegades such as T. H. Huxley--to convert it into an

equally implacable but this-worldly power as capable of punishing 'the great evils of disobedience to natural laws' as of rewarding a submission to 'the great and fundamental truths of Nature and [the] laws of her operation.' Science reduced the salvation of the soul to the survival of the species, but its grim emphasis on 'consequences' was almost identical to that of the old religion." ¹⁸

There has been a shift from one minor key to another but no change of mode. The belief in "universal causality" ¹⁹ which provides a framework for the novels can be seen to originate in George Eliot's melancholy, anxiety-ridden nature. It is this very awareness of "the pressure of hard non-moral outward conditions" ²⁰ that calls forth her compassion for the struggling, suffering individual. This is accompanied by her yearning hope that "the effort of growing moral force" ²¹ can serve to lighten that pressure a little. The intellectual pattern of belief and the emotional resonance associated with this belief create a double vision in the novels. Felicia Bonaparte refers to "two narrative voices"; ²² Barbara Smalley in a comparison between George Eliot and Flaubert uses the term "binocular vision." ²³ George Eliot's perspective shifts continuously from the general to the individual, focussing on the "irresistible power" ²⁴ of the one, the "nothingness" ²⁵ of the other and the painful collisions that ensue.

I will now look at the structural correlatives of such a shifting focus and the stringent technical requirements necessary if George Eliot is to keep the essential balance between the different points of view. It is a question of controlling aesthetic distance. We have already seen her progressive control of balance from Adam Bede via Romola to Middlemarch, where Lydgate's dismissal of the town and its inhabitants as a "petty medium" ²⁶ contains in the one phrase, both our awareness of the reality of his situation and his own arrogantly false assessment of

it. Let us now consider in greater detail George Eliot's manipulation of this balance.

Aesthetic Balance..

If we examine the potentially tragic character of Mr Casaubon in Middlemarch we can see that by a skilful control of focus George Eliot offers us a great deal more than the caricature of a pedantic scholar. The various reports of Mr Casaubon that accumulate in the early chapters of the book, reveal that we are being presented with a picture of him in diverse reflecting mirrors. The different comments made about him by Dorothea, Celia, Mrs Cadwallader, and Sir James Chettam superficially describe him, but in fact, tell us far more about them and their prejudices. The first exchange between the two sisters offers us a choice of attitudes towards Mr Casaubon.

~~When the two girls were in the drawing-room alone, Celia said-~~

"How very ugly Mr Casaubon is!"

"Celia! He is one of the most distinguished-looking men I ever saw. He is remarkably like the portrait of Locke. He has the same deep eye-sockets."

"Had Locke those two white moles with hairs on them?"

"Oh! I daresay! when people of a certain sort looked at him," said Dorothea, walking away a little.

"Mr Casaubon is so sallow." ¹

This conversation is typical of other representations of Mr Casaubon, whose physical attributes appear to arouse intense disgust. He has excessively thin calves, a generally grey and desiccated appearance, and he scrapes his spoon on his plate when he is eating soup which particularly offends Celia. Mrs Cadwallader is wittily scathing about his lack of vitality. This reinforces our impression that the Vicar's wife enjoys her reputation of being direct and outspoken, even somewhat eccentric, but our impression of Mr Casaubon's arid style of speaking and writing lends credence to her view. "'Somebody put a drop [of his blood] under a magnifying glass,'" she retorts in answer to a disgusted remark from Sir James Chettam, "'and it was all semicolons and parentheses.'" ²

It is Dorothea's engagement to him that calls forth such disapprobation. She herself is "ardently" self-deluded about her future husband. "Dorothea by this time had looked deep into the unguaged reservoir of Mr Casaubon's mind, seeing reflected there in vague labyrinthine extension every quality she herself brought."³ But at this point the authorial comment, silent up till now, warns us that "because Miss Brooke was hasty in her trust, it is not therefore clear that Mr Casaubon was unworthy of it."⁴

Usually the omniscient narrator adopts an ironic tone towards Mr Casaubon as in the following passage hinting at his possible impotence. His years of devotion to scholarship have been very lonely, and now "he determined to abandon himself to the stream of feeling, and perhaps was surprised to find what an exceedingly shallow rill it was. As in droughty regions baptism by immersion could only be performed symbolically, so Mr Casaubon found that sprinkling was the utmost approach to a plunge which his stream would afford him."⁵ After rejecting the idea that Dorothea is in his some way deficient he concludes that "the poets had much exaggerated the force of masculine passion."⁶

Our perspective on Mr Casaubon has shifted considerably during these different scenes; we have observed him through the eyes of various imperfect witnesses and have also been given a general overarching view of him through the ironic eyes of the omniscient narrator. At this point the angle of vision narrows exceedingly and we enter his own consciousness. George Eliot signals clearly what she is doing as her narrative voice changes from an ironic to a compassionate tone.

Suppose we turn from outside estimates of a man, to wonder, with keener interest, what is the report of his own consciousness about his doings or capacity: with what hindrances he is carrying on his daily labours; what fading of hopes, or what deeper fixity of self-delusion the years are marking off within him; and with what spirit he wrestles against universal pressure, which will

one day be too heavy for him, and bring his heart to its final 7
 pause....Mr Casaubon, too, was the centre of his own world....

And accordingly, we are invited to enter the narrow circle of that world inhabited by "a small hungry shivering self." ⁸ We observe his loneliness, his despair at his unfinished scholarship, his anxious concealing of his self-doubts, and his dread of sympathy. In The Mill on the Floss our attitude towards Tom Tulliver is strongly influenced by our sense of outrage at his treatment of Maggie; this means that we have difficulty sympathising with his undoubted suffering and the bleak narrowing of his life following Mr Tulliver's "failure." It is a mark of George Eliot's matured control that despite a similar identification with Dorothea we are capable of feeling compassion for Mr Casaubon. Actually our identification with Dorothea is an important aspect of our compassion for Mr Casaubon. As she painfully comes to realise that he has "an equivalent centre of self," ⁹ we also have to reconsider our assessment of him. Our appreciation of the fineness of Dorothea's character requires of us an attitude of tolerant sympathy towards her husband. This is one of the ways George Eliot seeks to enlarge the sensibilities of her readers by inducing that sympathy which, to her, is the essential mark of the moral sense.

Dorothea's changed perspective of Mr Casaubon is presented metaphorically in terms of the opposition between the "hard unaccommodating Actual" ¹⁰ and the blurred conception of that actual offered by the egoistic imagination. Indeed her changed way of seeing is as much a revised perception of herself. She recognises how far she has only herself to blame if her idealisation of her husband has raised false expectations in her. She realises that the "new real future which was replacing the imaginary drew its material from the endless minutiae by which her view of Mr Casaubon and her wifely relation, now that she was married to him,

was gradually changing with the secret notion of a watch-hand from what it had been in her maiden dream." ¹¹ The watch image significantly contrasts the objective and measured process of marking time with the subjective and individual notion of time held by the imagination.

I have said that some of our acceptance of Mr Casaubon as an object of compassion rather than of amused scorn derives from the fineness of Dorothea's nature. But the authorial comment and dramatic presentation of Mr Casaubon are also important because they show both his suffering and his "passionate egoism." ¹² George Eliot tells us, for example, that

He had not had much foretaste of happiness in his previous life. To know intense joy without a strong bodily frame, one must have an enthusiastic soul. Mr Casaubon had never had a strong bodily frame, and his soul was sensitive without being enthusiastic.... His experience was of that pitiable kind which shrinks from pity, and fears most of all that it should be known: it was that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egoistic scrupulosity. ¹³

It is a sad picture but we are not to let pathos interfere with our moral judgement. George Eliot is cueing us as to Mr Casaubon's character. The fact that his soul has not "mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy" reveals unmistakably Mr Casaubon's moral worth.

To preserve aesthetic distance, a "blend of sympathy and detached observation" ¹⁴ is necessary. In the case of Mr Casaubon there was obviously a risk that the detached observation would obscure the sympathy. George Eliot is perfectly aware of this and shifts our attention suddenly and surprisingly from Dorothea to Mr Casaubon as if to chastise us for refusing him an equal share of humanity.

One morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea-- but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble; for these too will get faded, and will know the older and more eating griefs which we are helping to neglect. In spite of the blinking eyes and white moles objectionable to Celia, and the want of muscular curve which was morally painful to Sir James, Mr Casaubon had an

intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungered like the rest of us.¹⁵

The insufficiency of the various people who judge Mr Casaubon so harshly blends with the ironic authorial commentary and the low-key compassionate reporting of his consciousness. There is a constant shifting of perspective. The authorial distance ranges from a remote generalised portrait, through opinions and attitudes expressed by the other characters, through dramatic presentation until it homes in on "the character's report of his own consciousness."¹⁶ The device George Eliot frequently uses in presenting the thought processes of her characters in the third person, a device linguists refer to as erlebte Rede, is functionally significant in these shifts of perspective. It creates no hiatus between George Eliot's own generalised commentary on her character and the character's own inner dialogue. This makes for an extreme density of effect and requires great concentration from the reader if he is to pick up the changes in direction. The "first distinct colloquy"¹⁷ Tito Melema has with himself, in Romola, illustrates this.

Tito's thoughts, memories, rationalisations, and self-justifications merge almost imperceptibly with passages of authorial comment and necessary descriptive pieces. We watch Tito convince himself that it is not certain that his father, Baldassarre, is still alive; we share his memory of his early childhood. Quite separately we get a glimpse of that childhood viewed through other eyes than his. In this way, we register both the strong argument in favour of his feeling gratitude towards his father and the equally clear exposition of those features of Tito's character which even then would preclude gratitude and make him feel that he was getting from his father only what he deserved. We read, for example, that he was "a radiant presence for a lonely man to have won for himself. If he were silent when his father expected some response, still

he did not look moody; if he declined some labour--why, he flung himself down with such a charming, half-smiling, half-pleading air, that the pleasure of looking at him made amends to one who had watched his growth with a sense of claim and possession." ¹⁸ The next two sentences show the skilful interweaving of the two viewpoints. The ironic question, "Would anyone have said that Tito had not made a rich return to his benefactor, or that his gratitude and affection would fail on any great demand?" shifts almost imperceptibly into Tito's musing with the quick rejoinder that "he did not admit that his gratitude had failed; but it was not certain that Baldassarre was in slavery, ~~not certain that he was~~ living." ¹⁹

In this instance, it would not be appropriate to describe the second narrative voice as sympathetic; it would be even more accurate to say that here there is only the one narrative voice, the ironic. The irony occurs, as with Arthur Donnithorne, because of George Eliot's skilful presentation of the two points of view. We see Tito from the outside, the extra-spective view, and we see the workings of his consciousness, the introspective view. Thus we are constantly aware of the contradiction between what is the case and what Tito thinks to be the case. It is not merely that he is mistaken; it is the element of self-deception which is emphasised by George Eliot's subtly controlled narrative voice.

The examples I have offered so far, Mr Casaubon and Tito Melema, illustrate successful control of aesthetic distance in George Eliot's presentation of character. However, there is a group of idealised characters towards whom George Eliot fails to achieve the necessary blend of detached observation and sympathy; instead of the double narrator we have only the sympathetic narrator and the tone of ironic detachment is missing. George Eliot's failure to maintain an adequate aesthetic distance is a major factor in the general dissatisfaction felt with

these characters, Romola, Felix Holt, and Daniel Deronda, and with the novels that bear their names.

When we look at George Eliot's presentation of Romola we see instantly the damaging effect of the loss of the ironic narrator. Romola is a stilted two-dimensional character, who, for all her painful moral struggle, never takes on the roundedness of living flesh. She is idealised and towards the end of the novel when she drifts in the boat to the plague-ridden village, mythologised. It is not just the omission of the ironic narrator that makes her remote; unlike Dorothea, she has no prosaic younger sister to comment on her excesses. Celia has, for example, the uncomfortable belief that theories, and Dorothea is given to theories, are not unlike spilt pins and cause a comparable inconvenience when you sit or eat. And George Eliot satirises with gentle irony, her own youthful asceticism, when she makes the following comment about Dorothea and her horse-riding. "Riding was an indulgence which she allowed herself in spite of conscientious qualms; she felt that she enjoyed it in a pagan sensuous way, and always looked forward to renouncing it." ²⁰

Such a range of varied comments is lacking in the presentation of Romola. The following description of her patience under the boring demands of her blind father's scholarly pursuits is characteristic.

As Romola said this, a fine ear would have detected in her clear voice and distinct utterance, a faint suggestion of weariness struggling with habitual patience. But as she approached her father and saw his arms stretched out a little with nervous excitement to seize the volume, her hazel eyes filled with pity; she hastened to lay the book on his lap, and kneeled down by him, looking up at him as if she believed the love in her face must surely make its way through the dark obstruction that shut out everything else. At that moment the doubtful attractiveness of Romola's face, in which pride and passion seemed to be quivering in the balance with native refinement and intelligence, was transfigured to the most lovable womanliness by mingled pity and affection: it was evident that the deepest fount of feeling within her had not yet wrought its way to the less changeable features, and only found its outlet through her eyes. ²¹

This authorial portrait of Romola is repeated in the various comments

of the Florentines that know her; the barber, Nello, the crusty, eccentric painter, Piero di Cosimo, and inevitably her father and godfather. Her foolish cousin, Monna Brigida, contributes the following description of Romola's striking appearance when the two of them are going, disguised, to San Marco for an interview with the dying Dino. "'Let Romola muffle herself as she will,'" she declares, "'everyone wants to see what there is under her veil, for she has that way of walking like a procession.'" ²² When Romola rescues Tessa from the importunate Florentine youths, we read that "suddenly a gentle hand was laid on her arm, and a soft, wonderful voice, as if the Holy Madonna were speaking said, 'Do not be afraid; no one shall harm you.'" ²³

Even if we make allowance for Tessa's childlike credulity and awe, the tone of this description differs very little from the prevailing tone adopted towards Romola by her creator. We do not see Romola indulging in flashes of temper, as Dorothea does over Celia's too precise observation of her enjoyment of their mother's jewels. We do not see her giving in to pique, inventing an instant opinion and having consistently to defend it, as happens when Dorothea informs Sir James Chetam that she is not going to ride again. In short, we do not have any humanising touches in the treatment of Romola.

The idealisation of Romola blinds us as well to the fact that her loss of trust in Tito is initially a matter of an emotive intuition rather than a judgement based on evidence. Because we already know that he has betrayed his father and have accordingly adapted a condemnatory attitude towards him, we ignore the fact that Romola rejects him on insufficient grounds. We know he is guilty and so we accept that her intuitions are right and we do not question her self-righteous tone or her failure of trust. We learn of her growing disappointment in her marriage and watch her attempts to make allowances for the differences of temper-

ament between herself and Tito. Then there is the episode where she accidentally sees Piero's painting of a Titic blanché by fear being clutched by Baldassarre. Romola at this time knows him only as the escaped prisoner and is aware of no possible connection between him and Tito. Piero does his best to avert her attention from the painting but "he had shown a little too much anxiety in putting the sketch out of her sight, and had produced the very impression he had sought to prevent--that there was really something unpleasant, something disadvantageous to Tito, in the circumstances out of which the picture arose." ²⁴ Yet Piero di Cosimo himself has no evidence for any such supposition about Tito. Later when she learns that Tito has betrayed her father's trust and allowed the library to be dispersed, in the violence of her reaction she rounds on him passionately and asks, "Have you robbed somebody else, who is not dead? Is that the reason you wear armour?" Romola," we are told, "had been driven to utter the words as men are driven to use the lash of the horsewhip." ²⁵ The word "driven" almost suggests that her angry questions are not just random rhetoric but express some hidden knowledge. Yet it is because we know that the answer to her question is "Yes," that we pass over the coincidence of her lighting on just that accusation. It is pure guess-work on her part and not, of course, on her author's.

This same willingness to believe the worst of Tito runs through the rest of the novel, and Romola's distrust of her husband runs parallel to ours, although she is less well-informed. If we examine Romola dispassionately we can see that she manifests much the same rigidity and self-righteousness that flaw the character of Adam Bede. Like Adam, she certainly comes to recognise this but we must not forget that her initial rejection of Tito stems from her dissatisfaction that he is out so much in the evening, that he shirks working with her father, and that

he is more inclined towards lightness and pleasure than she is herself. When, for example, during their courtship, he says that he would like to take her away from the grimness of Florence's grey slate, Romola's response is indicative of her reluctance to surrender herself, even temporarily, to a life of sensuous ease. Tito says persuasively,

'I should like to see you under that southern sun, lying among the flowers, subdued into mere enjoyment, while I bent over you and touched the lute and sang to you some little unconscious strain that seemed all one with the light and the warmth. You have never known that happiness of the nymphs, my Romola.'
 'No; but I have dreamed of it often since you came. I am very thirsty for a deep draught of joy-- for a life all bright like you. But we will not think of it now, Tito; it seems to me as if there would always be pale sad faces among the flowers and eyes that look in vain.' ²⁶

Taken out of context, Romola's response to Tito's honeymoon suggestion is dauntingly moralistic and certainly lends credence to the view of a critic like Calvin Bedient when he claims that George Eliot, like the majority of Victorians, was terrified of the flesh. ²⁷ In the context of the novel, however, we already know of Tito's hedonistic assessment of claims on him, and "the pale sad faces" and "eyes that look in vain" are inevitable reminders to the reader of Tito's betrayal of his father. In this way Tito's vision of joy is debased and Romola's rejection of it becomes a further mark of her moral worth.

The absence of any ironic perspective in the treatment of Romola destroys some of her credibility in our eyes. Her progress out of "moral stupidity" ²⁸ becomes a model for moral development in general, a kind of textbook example. Tito, for all his creator's moral disapproval, is presented more in the round and achieves a greater degree of autonomy. The loss of a sympathetic narrative voice is less damaging to a novel as a whole than the loss of the ironic voice.

Felix Holt and Daniel Deronda, and Dinah Morris from Adam Bede, all suffer in the same way as Romola. They are scarcely allowed to exhibit

any redeeming human weaknesses. Felix's tendency to adopt the rôle of the "angry pedagogue" ²⁹ still has George Eliot's approval; Deronda's vacillating over a career and his habit of acquiring lame dogs are presented as desirable character traits. These characters are winners and even if we do not necessarily feel that their rewards are enviable--marrying Adam, caring for Tessa and the children, social work in a slum, and crusading to the Middle East--we are enjoined to feel the utmost respect for these characters. However, for all their moral failings, Mr Casaubon and Gwendolen Harleth, for example, are more memorable than this gallery of pious characters I have been describing. We feel more sympathy for their tortured humanity than we do for those characters where George Eliot's sympathetic voice dominates.

These are some of the triumphs and some of the failures of George Eliot's characterisation. Where she finds a satisfactory structural correlative for her two-fold vision, she succeeds admirably; where her perspective is insufficiently varied or her control of aesthetic distance is disturbed by an excess of sympathy, she is considerably less successful.

Let us now examine other implications of her intellectual and moral standpoint.

Precepts to People.

If we plot the co-ordinates of George Eliot's intellectual and moral position we can determine how she achieves a "philosophical equilibrium."¹ We can detect unmistakable signs of her allegiance to association or evolutionary psychology and can uncover her adherence to a belief in the possibility of moral progress, whether of the individual or of the race. But George Eliot was not writing philosophical treatises. Consequently we need to approach her novels differently from the way in which we confront such works as J. S. Mill's The System of Logic or G. H. Lewes' The Study of Psychology which provide methodologies for discussing aspects of human behaviour in general and abstract terms. A novelist has rather to present convincing personalised and individual descriptions of human behaviour and motivation, and has to achieve a "practical equilibrium"² in terms of plot and characterisation. Thus, an analysis or description of George Eliot's psychological and moral assumptions provides no indication of how successfully she has incorporated these assumptions into her novels. It may indicate the parameters of a character's growth or decline but can convey no critical assessment of the success or failure of her achievements. A knowledge of the relationship between her thought and that of her contemporaries may illuminate the novels in one area but cannot of itself offer an evaluative commentary. To bridge this gap between description and evaluation, it is necessary to examine the implications of George Eliot's framework of belief.

We have already discussed the ways in which she defines the self-hood of her characters, and the sorts of opportunities she offers them. We have examined her control of narrative balance in the shifting of

perspective between the "hard unaccommodating Actual"³ and the struggling individual. But when we come to analyse George Eliot's world view in terms of her treatment of individual characters, we find ourselves predominantly concerned with her allowance of freedom to those characters.

In an early novel, The Mill on the Floss, Maggie Tulliver struggles, falls short of her self-imposed ideals, and ultimately triumphs. In her last novel, Daniel Deronda, George Eliot shows us her hero willingly accepting the dictates of a duty which is laid upon him by the facts of his Jewish parentage. To show us Maggie's upward progress, George Eliot makes use of the assumptions underlying the theory of psychological determinism, which, as we have seen, owes much to the laws of association. These describe how we learn in any given situation and especially how we come to acquire habitual responses. The downward moral graph of such characters as Arthur Donnithorne, Tito Melema, Godfrey Cass, Nicholas Bulstrode and, even to a certain extent, Tertius Lydgate, has been plotted by means of this theory of psychological determinism with its emphasis on cause and effect and its rigid straightline development. But as a means of depicting the upward development of a character like Maggie, it is less satisfactory. In much the same way as Tito Melema is bound more closely by his choices, Maggie's successive choices do not enfranchise her but instead they constrain and limit her freedom. In Daniel Deronda, we see a comparable loss of freedom. In this novel, we can recognise George Eliot's acceptance of the tenets of evolutionary psychology. Deronda's search for a commitment, for a duty, takes on the form of a search for himself. His ignorance of his parentage becomes for him an ignorance of his identity. The revelation of his Jewishness is eagerly welcomed by him as an indication of where his duty lies. We are led to believe that he chooses freely and willingly. But if we scrutinise

the "hereditary, entailed Nemesis,"⁴ the duty, which George Eliot imposes on him in the form of his Jewish ancestry, we can see that she does not provide him with a free range of choices. In fact, she is practising sleight-of-hand and offering him very limited options.

Let us now examine in some detail the measure of freedom allowed to these two characters, Maggie and Deronda, in order to decide how far George Eliot's system of beliefs imposes limitations on their development.

Morally ascending characters in George Eliot's canon most usually achieve their growth as a result of the influence on them of some other character. (I have called this the mentor/pupil relationship.) Otherwise, like Adam Bede or Dorothea, they grow through suffering. Dorothea is different in another respect, in that she presents to herself a goal of idealised behaviour; it is not suggested to her by some other character. Maggie Tulliver is also treated differently. Her mentor is no living person; it is a mediaeval, devotional text which offers her an ideal of behaviour with special emphasis on renunciation of claims for herself. In The Imitation of Christ, Maggie found "an effort and a hope that helped her through years of loneliness, making out a faith for herself without the aid of established authorities and appointed guides."⁵

This "faith" which she makes out for herself develops her conscience and heightens her moral sensibility. Her goal of self-denial is shown consistently to be moral and secular, not Christian. And we can recognise a relationship between the way in which Maggie internalises the message of Thomas à Kempis and the explicit formation of George Eliot's system of psychological determinism with a consequent loss of freedom. Let us now examine the impact that The Imitation of Christ had on Maggie's life and moral development.

The most direct effect of Maggie's submission to the spiritual guidance of Thomas à Kempis is to be seen in the developing sensitivity of her conscience. Her initial reading of the marked passages is described as if she is not merely reading, but listening to an actual person, "seeming rather to listen [to] a low voice." ⁶ And the suggestion is early made that she can find the much sought-for guidance in her own self, in her own moral and spiritual awareness. She discovers that "here was insight, and strength, and conquest, to be won by means entirely within her own soul, where a supreme Teacher was waiting to be heard." ⁷ The effect of Feuerbach's demythologising of the Christian message is unmistakable here. It is the human soul which is divine, therefore the word "Teacher" is given the upper case. To find this Teacher, Maggie internalises the "quiet voice" and makes its teaching her own. Thus, when Philip offers Maggie his company and shared discourse about books and music and painting, his tempting voice is contrasted both with the inner voice of her conscience and with the "voice of a brother who, ages ago, felt and suffered and renounced--in the cloister, perhaps, with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours--but under the same silent far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness." ⁸ It is an amalgam of both these voices, the distant voice of Thomas à Kempis and the inner voice of her conscience which interrupts Philip's tempting offer of friendship. In this way "the voice that said this made sweet music to Maggie; but athwart it there came an urgent monotonous warning from another voice which she had been learning to obey." ⁹ And later when she is grappling with the full force of the temptation, longing to enjoy his proffered company and free herself from "the narrow valley of humiliation," the "severe monotonous warning came again and

and again." ¹⁰

When she wakes in the steamer which is taking her and Stephen to Mudport, she stiffens her resolution in dread "lest her conscience should be benumbed again." ¹¹ And in her final moments of "wrestling" ¹² with herself, she waits for the inner "light" ¹³ and gives herself strength by uttering memorised words from The Imitation of Christ.

In this way Maggie uses Thomas à Kempis as a spiritual mentor, but it is important to remember that this work contains no particularised instruction. Rather it discusses the general duties of a Christian suppliant. No more than George Eliot herself does Thomas à Kempis prescribe special behaviour for particular circumstances. Towards the end of her life George Eliot expressly denied any such intention. "My function," she wrote, "is that of the aesthetic, not the doctrinal teacher--the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of special measures." ¹⁴ Thomas à Kempis has served to rouse in Maggie the "nobler emotions" or more accurately to reinforce them. We can see that Maggie already has a moral sensibility far in advance of her family and very well developed in so young a child, in her sensitive response to Philip's deformity, for example. ¹⁵ The goal of ideal behaviour which Maggie sets herself after her reading of The Imitation of Christ is elevated into a general principle, akin to Mr Lyon's "higher rule" ¹⁶ and Dorothea's "perfect Right." ¹⁷ We read that she has "years of striving after the highest and best," ¹⁸ of "longings after perfect goodness," ¹⁹ that she responds to "the possibility of shifting the position from which she looked at the gratification of her own desires--of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely-guided whole." ²⁰ And, in addition to this central aspect of Maggie's moral development, there is a background of moral commentary, sometimes

authorial and at other times placed within the thoughts of George Eliot's spokesman, Dr Kenn. He extols the same moral virtues as Maggie aspires towards and defines the nature of morality as George Eliot sees it. There is an insistence, for example, that there is no short-cut to moral decisions, that what is indispensable is profound sympathy and insight into human motivation and suffering, and a wide tolerance. Dr Kenn, approving Maggie's decision not to marry Stephen, comments on the moral laxity he sees around him. "At present," he declares, "everything seems tending towards the relaxation of ties-- towards the substitution of wayward choice for the adherence to obligation, which has its roots in the past." ²¹

By converting the guidance of The Imitation of Christ into an inner voice of conscience, George Eliot is not significantly diverging from the original intentions of Thomas à Kempis. But in turning the principle of renunciation of self into a moral principle and diluting the specifically Christian message of The Imitation of Christ, she is altering its original conception. Thomas à Kempis advocates self-renunciation so that the soul of the suppliant may be cleared of egoism to make room for the love of God; it is a means to an end, not the end itself. The difference between George Eliot's interpretation and use of The Imitation of Christ and the actual meaning of the work becomes clear when I re-insert a missing passage. The last section that George Eliot has Maggie read has an important omission. I will now write it out in full but first must mention that the "I" of the passage is not Thomas à Kempis but Christ.

5. I have very often said to thee, and I say it now again, forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy a great inward peace.
Give all for all, seek nothing, ask for nothing back, and stand purely, and with firm confidence in Me, and thou shalt have Me.
Thou shalt be free in thy own heart, and darkness shall not overwhelm thee.
Aim only at this, pray for this, desire this, that thou mayest

be stripped of self-seeking, and thus naked, follow Jesus naked; that thou mayest die to thyself, and live eternally to Me.

Then all vain imaginations shall vanish, all evil disturbances, and superfluous cares.

Then also immoderate fear shall leave thee, and inordinate love shall die. ²²

The missing sections I have underlined reveal that the surrender of the will is required so that the suppliant can be ruled by the will of God. Maggie, however, surrenders her will as a good in itself. She asks Philip, "Is it not right to resign ourselves entirely, whatever may be denied us? I have found great peace in that for the last two or three years-- even joy in subduing my own will." ²³ And we have earlier been told of her mother's "puzzled wonder" at the change in Maggie. "It was amazing that this once 'contrairy' child was become so submissive, so backward to assert her own will." ²⁴

This brief discussion of the difference between Thomas à Kempis' actual instructions and George Eliot's, and therefore Maggie's, interpretation of them reveals a possible danger to Maggie in the adoption of a principle of renunciation without the promised reward or guidance of Christ. And this leads us to an examination of another aspect of the influence Maggie receives from her mediaeval, devotional text. We have seen that she internalises the general precept until it becomes the voice of her conscience and that she uses it as an abstract guiding principle at times of moral crisis. It reinforces her natural tendency to give importance to faithfulness and to loyalty towards the bondage of the past. We need now to consider how this comes about. The surest clue that we get, apart from the reference to the "voice," ²⁵ occurs when Maggie catches a glimpse of Philip on his visit to the mill with his father. She wonders whether he would still admire her eyes and has to beat down her impulse to fetch the mirror and look at herself. We read that "she checked herself and snatched up her work, trying to repress

the rising wishes by forcing her memory to recall snatches of hymns." ²⁶ Later we learn that she "had long ago learned by heart" ²⁷ the words of the little book. In this way she has "filled her mind with a continual stream of rhythmic memories" ²⁸ and incidentally has satisfied some of her aesthetic hunger. The "rhythmic memories" and her frequent recalling of them show that she is utilising a learning method based on associationist principles. At moments of crisis she repeats "snatches" of hymns, or of the Bible, or of The Imitation of Christ rather in the same way as mystics use a mantra for meditation. In this way she trains her mind to a practised and habitual response. Ultimately, this differs little from George Eliot's description of Tito Melema's "undying habit of fear" ²⁹ or Maggie's own comparison of herself with the unhappy white bear pacing the boundary lines of an imaginary cage. ³⁰ Maggie has acquired a technique by constant repetition which helps her to persevere in her conscious intention of "taking her stand outside herself." ³¹ The intention may well be admirable but the technique with its constant reinforcement means a lessening of Maggie's freedom to choose. The very goal of surrendering her will inevitably means that she is abdicating from the responsibility of choice.

There is a strong contradiction implicit in the fact that as Maggie, with the aid and guidance of The Imitation of Christ, becomes morally more sensitive and aware she appears voluntarily to choose not to exert her will, which means in effect that she does not choose. I quoted earlier J. S. Mill's affirmation that "we are exactly as capable of making our own character, if we will, as others are of making it for us." ³² When this principle is applied to characters like Arthur Donnithorne or Tito Melema, it reads somewhat wryly. The whole point about their moral decline is their ignorance of the modifications they are making to their own personalities by their successive choices. They

do not "choose," in Mill's sense, to make their characters base and ignominious. On the other hand, Maggie can certainly be said to have chosen to make her character. She decides consciously and deliberately to practise self-renunciation until it becomes an habitual response,, part of her character. The theory of psychological determinism showing how bondage is created by laying down and "fixing" of habits works supremely well with a morally declining character. It is strangely inappropriate for George Eliot to have used this same technique to portray the moral ascendancy of her heroine. The reader accepts that habits of concealment, or prevarication, or fear entail loss of freedom. This leads to no contradiction within George Eliot's own scheme, so that a character like Tito can have increasingly less freedom while he persists in not recognising the fact. We accept that Lydgate's arrogant assumption of superiority over circumstances, which is indicative of his sadly lower moral stature, is entirely delusory. The encoded messages, however, that surround Maggie tell us firmly that she is not of their kind; she is warmly sympathetic and "sees" more truly than the people around her. Her decision to reject Stephen is diminished if she is not seen to have a genuine freedom of choice at that moment, if she is constrained by habitual self-renunciatory responses. George Eliot certainly wants us to feel that she is free to choose, but a close analysis of the text reveals that we are on uncertain ground, that even George Eliot has doubts as to the nature of Maggie's two major moral decisions; the one affecting Philip at the time when she is determined not to continue seeing him, and the other when she rejects Stephen, especially the second time after receiving his anguished letter.

There is a piece of authorial commentary following Maggie's first unexpected encounter with Philip which shades almost imperceptibly into Maggie's own thoughts about the situation by means of the technique,

erlebte Rede.

Here suddenly was an opening in the rocky wall which shut in the narrow valley of humiliation, where all her prospect was the remote unfathomed sky; and some of the memory-haunting earthly delights were no longer out of her reach. She might have books, converse, affection-- she might hear tidings of the world from which her mind had not yet lost its sense of exile; and it would be a kindness to Philip too, who was pitiable--clearly not happy ... must she always live in this resigned imprisonment? ³³

This indicates that George Eliot herself regarded Maggie's self-renunciation as somewhat perverse, and certainly we have already been warned that Maggie adopts this practice with "some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity." ³⁴ The phrase "resigned imprisonment" recalls as well her statement to the reader that Maggie "has not perceived--how could she until she had lived longer?--the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly." ³⁵

George Eliot's concern for her heroine becomes even more marked after Maggie has received Stephen's letter.

When Maggie first read this letter she felt as if her real temptation had only just begun. At the entrance of the chill dark cavern, we turn with unworn courage from the warm light; but how, when we have trodden far in the damp darkness, and have begun to be faint and weary--how, if there is a sudden opening above us, and we are invited back again to the life-nourishing day? ³⁶
(my italics)

The juxtaposition of warmth and chill damp, of light, life-nourishing day and dark suggests unmistakably that George Eliot, despite her conscious intentions with regard to Maggie, is nonetheless somewhat unnerved by the impasse into which she has led her heroine. This anxiety runs counter to the surface development of Maggie's character. There have been several attempts to account for why George Eliot should have chosen to end the novel in the way she does; Maggie's spiritual worth, the deus ex machina of the flood, and Tom's final recognition of his sister's true character have all called forth different critical re-

sponses. Psychoanalytic critics have mooted either George Eliot's relationship with her brother, Isaac Evans,³⁷ or have seen Maggie's supreme moral victory as rather an instance of an immature dependence and a "neurotic strategy."³⁸ Feminist critics have likewise objected to the masochism³⁹ of George Eliot's treatment of Maggie expressed in such statements as "she had made up her mind to suffer."⁴⁰ These critical theories all endeavour to explain the reason for George Eliot's treatment of Maggie and as such are not susceptible of proof. I am offering explanations of how George Eliot brings Maggie to this pass, of how it is that so many readers of The Mill on the Floss are dissatisfied with George Eliot's solution for Maggie and detect that she herself is uneasy. I am not denying the validity within the world of the novel of the motives George Eliot supplies. I am merely seeing them as rationalisations of a decision that was inevitable, not because of Maggie's moral stature, not because she had a neurotic fear of asserting herself but because like the "poor uneasy white bear"⁴¹ she had acquired an habitual response; a response of submissiveness and renunciation of her own claims. Maggie is no more free to choose to behave differently than Arthur Donnithorne can avoid the "vitiating effect"⁴² of his actions or Tito can set aside his "undying habit of fear."⁴³ The "train of causes"⁴⁴ binds her as irrevocably as it binds Bulstrode. George Eliot's trenchant comment that "our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds"⁴⁵ applies as forcibly to Maggie as it does to Arthur. Maggie is as much a victim of a deterministic and mechanistic world view as the other characters I have been studying.

I have shown that a habit whether of fear or of renunciation is binding and the fact that George Eliot brings the weight of her authorial approval to bear on Maggie and the full bent of her irony on Tito Melema should not disguise from us that each character is equally con-

strained. I have also indicated that choosing to surrender one's will, whether it is done for moral or spiritual reasons, also inevitably implies a loss of freedom. It now remains for me to substantiate this claim that the technique by which George Eliot has chosen to present Maggie to us, based on the theory of psychological determinism, leaves her less free to choose than other morally evolved heroines, Esther Lyon, or Romola, or Dorothea, and in fact as restricted in her freedom as Arthur Donnithorne or Tito Melema.

According to W. J. Harvey, "the two most important factors determining the freedom of any character are ...the range of choices open to the character and the kind of chooser he is, as shown by the history of choices displayed by him or imputed to him in the past."⁴⁶ One of the interesting points about Maggie as a chooser is the division in her behaviour effected by her adoption of The Imitation of Christ as a guide. Before this time she is wilful, impetuous and assertive; she cuts her hair, spills gravy over the hated cast-off dress of aunt Glegg, pushes Lucy into the mud, and runs away to join the gypsies. While these actions do not manifest any real deliberate choice (they are all rather spontaneous attempts to solve impossible problems) they are undeniably the actions of a passionate and impulsive girl. Her decisions after reading Thomas à Kempis are of a different nature; they are no more choices than these previous acts of defiance but they are shorn of any wilfulness or impetuosity. They constitute non-actions in their passivity and submissiveness, a following a line of least resistance. Her only action, her decision to teach rather than live with Tom or aunt Glegg, is reported retrospectively so that we do not see any struggle she may have had to assert her will. When she "chooses" to see Philip, it is only because she snatches at his sophistry that if he should come along that way and meet her by accident then that would not be her fault. She does not

remonstrate further nor does she change the direction of her daily walk.

The whole relationship with Stephen is characterised quite specifically by "drifting,"⁴⁷ which suggests that Maggie is enveloped in a sensuous haze and is not in her more usual state of clear responsibility. She walks in the garden with him, she walks through the Conservatory and then runs away mortified that he has kissed her arm. The quick comment is very revealing; "that momentary happiness had been smitten with a blight--a leprosy: Stephen thought more lightly of her than he did of Lucy."⁴⁸ There is no doubt that the wilful assertive Maggie of the earlier book has not been completely assimilated to the new quietistic Maggie. Finally she drifts down the river with Stephen. This is an unconscious surrendering of her will in comparison with the earlier deliberate submissiveness. But the final decision to walk out of the inn, leave Stephen, and return to St Ogg's, although it seems like an assertive action, is yet another example of Maggie's habit of self-renunciation. To have decided to stay with Stephen would have meant discarding this habitual response. It is only when he pleads his desperate unhappiness that she momentarily wavers. In terms of her life history and her previous pattern of choices it would have been harder for her to stay with Stephen than it is for her to leave him because this habit of self-renunciation is now so firmly entrenched. Although outwardly she struggles against the temptation of Stephen's marriage proposal, her walking out of the inn is really her taking the line of least resistance. Because we commend the choice, we are asked to admire the moral courage of the chooser. Maggie is meant to seem free and untrammelled, and especially in this crucial final decision which reveals her moral superiority. Close analysis, however, reveals that she is as trapped in her habit of self-renunciation as Tito Melema in his habit of fear. Her decision to

reject Stephen, because it is totally in keeping with her years of longing after "perfect goodness,"⁴⁹ effectively disguises from us at first that her habit of self-renunciation constrains her to perform her act of moral courage.

This analysis has revealed that we are asked to approve Maggie for something she cannot help but do, and that George Eliot herself feels a vestigial uneasiness about her treatment of her heroine. Maggie is the only one of George Eliot's morally ascending characters whose presentation contains elements of psychological determinism, even if she is not depicted entirely in a straightline, cause and effect way. The fact that George Eliot rejects this technique for showing the upward movement of her characters after The Mill on the Floss supports my contention that she recognised its limitations.

George Eliot converted the learning theories of the school of association psychology into a technique for demonstrating character change. This technique works extremely well as a means of revealing the successive stages by which a character morally degenerates. But when it is used to depict the moral growth of a character, it introduces a contradiction. We are meant to feel that Maggie chooses to reject Stephen because of the years she has spent "longing for perfect goodness,"⁵⁰ in the same way that Dorothea, in Middlemarch, yearns for the "perfect Right,"⁵¹ subdues her own pain and jealousy, and visits Rosamond for the second time. We have seen, however, that Maggie cannot help her choice, because her years of practising submission make it impossible for her to assert herself. It therefore comes as no surprise that George Eliot rejected this technique in her presentation of the moral growth of her later characters. If moral decline is characterised by a narrowing of focus, a rigidity and a stubborn egoism, then we can expect that moral aware-

ness will demonstrate a breadth of sympathy, an opening out, and a greater degree of freedom. Strict habit formation does not suggest any of these. This is not to say that the laws of causation are miraculously suspended in the case of the later characters. The strict sequence of cause and effect is no less binding. It is merely that other aspects of moral growth are foregrounded and the formation of habits, even of such morally reputable habits as renunciation of self, is no longer emphasised. The principles underlying the theory of psychological determinism allow for trenchant analyses of moral deterioration; they provide too rigid a frame for the presentation of a character painfully achieving moral awareness.

The framework of belief that pervades The Mill on the Floss limits the freedom of the heroine. Let us now consider whether the tenets of evolutionary psychology which George Eliot utilises in Daniel Deronda allow the hero a full development.

He came back with what was better than freedom--with a duteous bond which his experience had been preparing him to accept gladly. 52

These words describing Deronda's state of mind after he meets his mother in Genoa reveal the opposition that George Eliot saw existing between freedom and duty. But does Deronda accept this "duteous bond" freely or is he constrained by his experiences, his ancestral yearning, and his creator's firm and unyielding hand? In answering this question I will briefly recapitulate what evolutionary psychologists have to say about ancestral memory and relate it to George Eliot's concept of duty. This will enable me to consider the implications of this theory for Deronda's freedom of choice and to analyse exactly how much freedom a morally evolved character can experience in a hierarchical moral scheme governed by such moral absolutes as duty and renunciation.

Evolutionary psychologists of the mid-nineteenth century reinstated the "something biologically given" ⁵³ that the French scientist, Gall, had recognised some fifty years earlier. According to this theory, ancestral experiences extending right back to the beginnings of mankind have left in the neurological circuits certain modified traces which determine our response to particular situations. Herbert Spencer has described how we have "intuitions of space," ⁵⁴ and he, Darwin and Lewes all state explicitly that feelings are developed in the same way (and it must not be forgotten that nineteenth century exponents of the moral sense regarded morality as primarily based on a feeling, namely sympathy.) Here they parted company with such earlier empiricists as Bain and Mill who still attributed individual differences to individual experiences within the one lifetime. In The Study of Psychology, Lewes neatly summarises this theory of ancestral inheritance with the dogmatic statement that "it is indisputable that every particular man comes into the world with a heritage of organised forms and definite tendencies, which will determine his feeling and thinking in certain definite ways, whenever the suitable conditions are present." ⁵⁵ Spencer refers to "universal ancestral experiences" ⁵⁶ but I have already indicated that George Eliot has broken away from this "universality." She provides her central Jewish characters in Daniel Deronda with specifically Jewish ancestral experiences which have a determining and thereby a limiting effect on their personalities and lives. Ancestry is another hereditary condition like sex, or time of birth, or eye colour, against which it is impossible to rebel. It is no coincidence that the two George Eliot characters, Deronda and Fedalma, who are the most stringently bound by their ancestry are kept in ignorance of this ancestry until they reach maturity. If they knew all along there would be no dramatic change of direction. Fedalma renounces her marriage to

don Silva and accepts her gypsy allegiance; Deronda gives up the idle life of an unproductive member of the upper middle class to set out on a reforming and hazardous mission to the East to foster Jewish nationalism. In both cases, however, the ancestral heritage is constantly fore-shadowed and anticipated and both of them recognise a certain inevitability in the revelation of their birth. Fedalma, for example, describes her reaction at her first glimpse of her then unknown father in the following words.

It found me there--
Seemed to have travelled far to find me there
And grasp me-- claim this festal life of mine
As heritage of sorrow, chill my blood
With the cold iron of some unknown bonds. 57

Evolutionary psychology, with its emphasis on a racial memory is not enough on its own to account for the behaviour of these two displaced persons. It is the acceptance of an implied obligation in the terms of their ancestry which is so binding and offers such a concussive check to their freedom. Fedalma, in the language of contracts, talks of redeeming a "pledge" and paying "debts."

O mother life,
That seemed to nourish me so tenderly,
Even in the womb you vowed me to the fire,
Hung on my soul the burden of men's hopes,
And pledged me to redeem!--I'll pay the debt. 58

As her "Notes on The Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy in general" reveal, George Eliot has melded a notion of inevitability, what she calls an "hereditary, entailed Nemesis,"⁵⁹ on to the evolutionary psychological notion of ancestral memory. We are now encumbered with a racial past which is as binding as our personal past. Nemesis here is surely not representative of "retributive justice" (OED, "Nemesis," 2) as there is no judgement involved for either Deronda or Fedalma. It is closer to our idea of Fate or the Greek Moirai, something inescapable that drastically determines the course of our lives. Fedalma actually ex-

plains to her fiance,

Silva, it is fate. 60
Great Fate has made me heiress of this woe.

In this way George Eliot creates an iron restraint on Jedalama and Deronda by identifying duty with ancestral heritage. Duty is one of George Eliot's constitutive categories, one of the encoded messages of her novels by means of which she cues her readers in their assessment of a character's worth. To refuse the mantle of ancestry now that it is compounded with duty would be to fall off badly on George Eliot's moral scale.

Let us now examine in some detail Deronda's situation prior to the revelation of his birth to see whether the two concepts are in fact so tightly woven that he is left with virtually no choice at all. Harvey's suggested formula for deciding about the amount of freedom granted to any character is useful again here: what sort of chooser he is and what range of choices is offered.⁶¹ Of Gwendolen and her decision to marry Grandcourt we are told that "she seemed to herself to be, after all, only drifted towards the tremendous decision:-but drifting depends on something besides the currents, when the sails have been set beforehand."⁶² We now need to see whether Deronda's sails are similarly pre-set in the direction of ancestral duties.

Deronda first enters our awareness as the ironic spectator of Gwendolen's success and then loss at the gambling table. Regrettably we do not witness his quixotic decision to redeem her necklace. It provides the action which binds these two characters together and illustrates the same interfering assumption of moral superiority that Felix Holt shows towards Esther Lyon. But the impulse to rescue is very strong in Deronda's nature, and constitutes, in fact, what George Eliot would refer to as a "bias" of his personality. We see this in his almost in-

instinctive rescue of Mirah and the constant help and advice he gives to his friend, Hans Meyerick. Sir Hugo more than once comments on Deronda's tendency to attract lame dogs and warns him to keep himself unscathed in such encounters. These acts, which are motivated by his concern for others, are examples of the exquisite moral sensibility George Eliot is at pains to display in this character. He would appear an insufferable prig if it were not for the fact that he does show a moral weakness, and a relatively serious one in George Eliot's canon: he is aimless and drifting. He himself is very much aware of this and associates his indecisiveness, his inability to commit himself to any profession or way of life, with his ignorance as to his parentage. In his own mind he feels that once this is cleared up he will feel free and thus be able to make some necessary commitment. Eventually this sense of a possible future partisanship becomes so identified in his mind with some duty connected with his parentage that he convinces himself that the two are identical really, not just ideally.

The evening on which he rescues Mirah his disaffected condition is made very clear. "It was already a year or more since he had come back to England," we discover, "with the understanding that his education was finished, and that he was somehow to take his place in English society; but though, in deference to Sir Hugo's wish, and to fence off idleness, he had begun to read law, this apparent decision had been without other result than to deepen the roots of indecision."⁶³ He is aware that his will is somewhat "paralysed,"⁶⁴ that he has fallen into a "meditative numbness."⁶⁵ He longs for "some external event, or some inward light, that [will] urge him into a definite line of action."⁶⁶ Instead, he feels as if he is "roaming ...like a yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social passion, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real."⁶⁷ He dreads, and at the same

eagerly awaits the disclosure of his birth, believing that it will carry with it some revelation that will end the "disembodied" ⁶⁸ state which troubles him. He hopes that it may help him "to make his life a sequence which [will] take the form of duty," that it will save him from "having to make an arbitrary selection where he [feels] no preponderance of desire." ⁶⁹ His state of mind here is very similar to those feelings Maggie Tulliver dreads will assail her if she breaks the bonds of connection to her past and disturbs, as it were, the sequence. She feels it will destroy her sense of identity; Deronda, for all his moral sensitivity to the sufferings of others, is having trouble establishing any sense of identity at all in the face of his uncertainty about his parentage. Maggie fears to destroy her roots, Deronda is anxiously seeking his. But his indecision and reticence paralyse him, in that he can no more tackle Sir Hugo squarely as to the question of his parentage than he can commit himself to some course of work.

This is his state of mind when he comes into contact with Mordecai, who functions as Deronda's spiritual mentor just as Deronda is Gwendolen's. The first real communication between the two men has been subtly prepared for. Deronda's mortification at the earlier abrupt cessation of Mordecai's interest in him once he states that he is not a Jew, and knows no Hebrew, is akin to Gwendolen's tremulous sense of inadequacy under his searching gaze at Leubronn. Accordingly, Deronda is partially ready to respond to Mordecai, and in addition, Mordecai is offering him the possibility of just the sort of commitment for which his soul is thirsting. The following remark about Deronda is indicative of his prior acceptance of Mordecai's visionary claim on him. "But the moment had influences which were not only new but solemn to Deronda: any evasion here might turn out to be a hateful refusal of some task that belonged to him, some act of due fellowship." ⁷⁰ (my italics) It is interesting to re-

member the derivation of the word "due." It comes originally from the French devoir and is thus linked etymologically with the word "duty."

Although the following chapter shows us Deronda examining Mordecai's claim with some scepticism, he is an easy subject for enthusiasm which affords a marked contrast to his previous disaffected state. The sails have been pre-set beforehand. The previous quotation is just another example of the anticipatory comments that lead us and Deronda to a passive acceptance not just of his parentage--after all he can no more alter that than he can change the time of his birth--but of the nationalistic implications of his birth. Even as he goes to Genoa to meet his mother he is emotionally prepared for accepting some responsibility or other and secretly hoping that it will take the form of the "very best of human possibilities ...the blending of a complete personal love in one current with a larger duty." ⁷¹ He hopes to learn that he is a Jew. We are told that after his meeting with his mother, "he came back with something like a discovered charter warranting the inherited right that his ambition had begun to yearn for: he came back with what was better than freedom--with a duteous bond which his experience had been preparing him to accept gladly." ⁷² Duty, and in Deronda's case, the embracing of a cause, provide a moral safeguard and protection against the "slavery of unregulated passion or impulse." ⁷³ Deronda's commitment to the cause of Jewish nationalism, a commitment which arises from the "duty" conferred on him by the facts of his ancestry, is better than a goalless freedom which is equated with slavery.

He returns to Mirah and Mordecai, excited and voluble, and pours out his recognition that his being a Jew has been operating below the level of his consciousness all the time. He now feels at home in the world. He talks of

an inherited yearning--the effect of brooding, passionate thoughts

in many ancestors--thoughts that seem to have been intensely present in my grandfather. Suppose the stolen offspring of some mountain tribe brought up in a city of the plain, or one with an inherited genius for painting, and born blind--the ancestral life would lie within them as a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations, and the spell-bound habit of their inherited frames would be like a cunningly-wrought musical instrument, never played on, but quivering throughout in uneasy mysterious meanings of its intricate structure that, under the right touch, gives music. Something like that, I think, has been my experience. ⁷⁴

Deronda's enthusiastic commitment to the Jewish cause is thematically contrasted with Grandcourt's moral laxity. The epigraph to chapter 25 shows the result of excessive aimlessness.

How trace the why and wherefore in a mind reduced to the barrenness of fastidious egoism, in which all direct desires are dulled, and have dwindled from motives into a vacillating expectation of motives: a mind made up of moods, where a fitful impulse springs here and there conspicuously rank amid the general weediness? 'Tis a condition apt to befall a life too much at large, unmoulded by the pressure of obligation. ⁷⁵

It is not surprising that we feel as we are expected to feel that Deronda is the more worthy for emerging from his state of drifting dilettanteism and for making a whole-hearted commitment to some impersonal cause when we are shown, very graphically, in the character of Grandcourt, some of the moral flaws attendant on the lack of a dutiful commitment.

The preceding section has set out the identification in George Eliot's mind between the principles of evolutionary psychology and duty. It has shown that Deronda, after several years of indecisiveness suddenly "chooses," supposedly freely, to accept Jewish partisanship and to work "to bind [his] race together in spite of heresy." ⁷⁶ We need now to examine whether in fact George Eliot has allowed him a free choice or whether the opposition between freedom and duty does not indicate an inflexible control of her character and a possible flaw in the novel.

I have already adumbrated my conclusion that, in actuality, the facts of evolutionary psychology, even Deronda's Jewish ancestry, do not in themselves constitute too drastically limiting a factor. Cert-

ainly they become yet another of the unmodifiable laws of existence against which it is not just futile but even impious to struggle. But it is the conjunction in George Eliot of hereditary conditions and duty, the creation of a "hereditary, entailed Nemesis," ⁷⁷ an awe-ful figure of Fate, that constitutes such a ckeck on a character's freedom of choice. Duty, as we have seen, is a moral absolute. Characters such as don Silva who insist on their own rights to choose are foredoomed. He exclaims, "I have a right to choose my good or ill." ⁷⁸ This provides a thematic contrast to Zarca's impassioned outburst to his daughter, that "being of the blood you are--my blood--/You have no right to choose." ⁷⁹ Fedalma has a pledge to redeem; as she says, "I'll pay the debt." ⁸⁰ Don Silva ends as a guilt-ridden pilgrim; Fedalma, although she believes her cause is hopeless now that her father is dead, retains a faithfulness and loyalty to the facts of her gypsy birth. She suffers as a result of her commitment; consequently her loss of freedom is more apparent. Deronda embraces his commitment eagerly; we are expected to rejoice with him. Don Silva takes the facts of his heritage for granted and imagines he can lightly dismiss them but he is wracked with remorse and horror when he realises that the gypsies have killed many of his compatriots. He realises too late that he is bound as stringently by the fact that he is born a Spanish Catholic as Fedalma is in her acknowledgement of her Zincoli blood. The other two have both experienced unexplained yearnings: Fedalma longs for space and freedom (the symbolic uncaging of the little birds provides an analogy here) ⁸¹ and Deronda reaches out for his "social captainship," ⁸² for an opportunity of self-dedication. They learn of their ancestry and both feel that some vital missing clue to their personalities and motivation is now supplied.

We need now to decide whether Deronda actually chooses or whether it would be truer to say that he has been chosen, that events have been

arranged in such a way that no choice is open to him. The inarticulate yearning was there as a tendency, a disposition of his personality, awaiting the right conditions (to paraphrase Lewes). The right conditions have now arrived and he seizes his opportunity with all the eagerness that comes from recognising clearly something that has been there all the time. It is no new situation; rather his realisation of his Jewishness is almost akin to a sense of déjà vu and is attended with a feeling of release from pressure. He himself fully realises that there is no more choice in his taking up Mordecai's plans than there would be in a displaced mountain dweller recognising and identifying his love for mountain scenery. It constitutes part of him that has been dormant, awaiting the right signal. There is a strong fatalistic sense of inevitability. George Eliot adds duty in the form of hereditary conditions to the other factors: the bias of the personality, and the social and environmental pressures of a person's life. She thus shows very clearly that the room for individual manoeuvre she allows her characters is pitifully slight. She wrote to Charles Ritter in 1878 that "the great division of our lot is that between what is immovable and is the object of resignation and that which is modifiable by hopeful activity--by new conceptions and new deeds." ⁸³

Hereditary conditions in the sense, then, of ancestral memory are "immovable" and, therefore, Deronda is adopting the wisest course in embracing necessity gladly. Fedalma, because her necessity involves sacrificing her love for don Silva, requires patience and resignation and this is how we leave her at the end of The Spanish Gypsy. But Deronda is able to be glad that his life is shaped the way it is. This does not, however, make him any the less constrained and limited. His grand choice is no choice but an acceptance of the inevitable. We must not allow the fact that it is presented as a noble choice to cloud our assessment. Up

to the time when he finds his identity in the facts of his birth, he has been indecisive and not much of a chooser. Now that he knows who he is and can embrace his duty we can see that his opportunity for choice is slight indeed.

We have seen that George Eliot saw an opposition existing between freedom and duty. We can recognise that, for her, a voluntary submission to duty, to a worthwhile cause, is preferable to aimlessness. While we may agree with that, it is undeniable that she does not allow Deronda a wider range of possibilities. He faces an either/or situation: aimlessness or duty; moral insufficiency or moral worth. These constitute the two extremes of a moral axis and all intermediate and moderate positions are ignored. Given such a choice, it is inevitable that Deronda does not hesitate. Duty, as we have already seen, in George Eliot's scheme has been elevated into an absolute.

In terms of the novel, however, in the ordering of characterisation and plot, this moral absolute inevitably creates an inflexible set of co-ordinates. The loss of freedom, in consequence, is considerable. George Eliot has converted the principles of evolutionary psychology into a moral straitjacket. She conceals this fact from her readers by the narrowness of choice that is offered to Deronda, by her preparation of the reader and Deronda himself for the ultimate commitment to a nationalistic goal, and by her presentation of Deronda as choosing willingly. It still remains that Deronda surrenders himself and his own will, however voluntarily. In this novel George Eliot has constrained Deronda to act in accordance with a rigid moral goal, and has converted the principles of evolutionary psychology for the purpose of her identification of Deronda's ancestral heritage with his duty.

Maggie Tulliver's choosing to reject Stephen appears to be in accordance with a principle of "perfect goodness,"⁸⁴ but her firmly entrenched habit of renunciation makes her "choice" inevitable. Deronda's commitment to the cause of Jewish nationalism appears to be unconstrained, but George Eliot's identification of hereditary claims with her moral absolute, duty, leaves him no choice. Thus, her incorporation of the principles of association and evolutionary psychology into her novels makes for a loss of freedom for her characters. And the constraining force of her moral absolute is even more pervasive. We are entitled, therefore, to ask the question: does it create inflexible co-ordinates which limit the development of character and plot? We have seen that its operation restricts the range of options George Eliot offers to her characters and sets out a rigidly defined path of moral development. In addition, it accounts for the many instances where George Eliot unequivocally directs the reader to adopt a specific attitude towards her characters. Sometimes these instances are blatant appeals to the reader's sensibility, but more usually they take the more subtle form of encoded messages, moral pointers directing the reader's response. George Eliot certainly controls her characters firmly, but she keeps a restraining hand on her reader as well.

Let us now examine the co-ordinates of her moral scheme so that we can determine what limitations they impose on the development of plot and character.

Throughout the novels we are given the chance to witness certain characters achieve a superior state of moral awareness. But instead of their being accorded greater autonomy and greater possibilities for creative action, their very moral goodness requires that they perform services which are even, at times, sacrificial of their own develop-

ment. George Eliot may write of "hopeful activity ...new conceptions and new deeds"⁸⁵ but as I have pointed out earlier, the new activity does not allow room for any "marginality."⁸⁶ The potential of her characters is not freely realised in their establishing of their own identity, their achieving of autonomy; instead, by means of either/or situations, the characters are brought to the point of denying their individuality in patient resignation to the service of others. Within the frame of reference of the novels, the loss of freedom or of originality is not manifest. Because we tend to accept George Eliot's premises, we find ourselves approving and condoning the various decisions, with only a vestigial uneasiness. If, however, we place the intellectual and moral constructs of George Eliot's world across the world of the novels, we see that she has to prune and distort in order to contain her characters and their development within her moral scheme. Accordingly, Janet Dempster has to rest contented in her autumnal afternoon; Maggie Tulliver has no alternative after her moral struggle but a glorious death; Romola does not even deliberate the pros and cons of looking after Tessa and the children, not just financially but in shared and torpid domesticity; Dorothea Brooke chooses between widowed stagnation at Lowick and marriage to Will Ladislav; and Deronda eagerly embraces the cause of Jewish nationalism.

Dorothea seeks the "perfect Right,"⁸⁷ Mr Lyon's "higher rule";⁸⁸ Deronda hopes for the "very best of human possibilities."⁸⁹ They have all set up for themselves a goal of service that transcends their own petty egoism and dissolves the distorting "speck of self."⁹⁰ We need to decide, however, whether such a selfless goal does not itself become as distorting a speck, as constraining a limitation as the speck of egoism. Basil Willey, paraphrasing Locke, states that "if a man comes under the habitual sway of duty, or religion, so that he is con-

strained always to choose what really is the greatest good, this is not to be understood as loss of liberty." ⁹¹ Such a viewpoint is entirely appropriate to a survey of moral philosophers. But in terms of a novel, it suggests that the characters will be brought to make this choice willy-nilly, and betokens a rigid control over their development. It also requires that the reader accept the writer's presentation of what constitutes the "greatest good." If we reject the idea of self-renouncing service, if we prefer to think in terms of identity rather than relationship, if, in short, we cannot accept the basic premises on which George Eliot bases her novelistic structures, we find ourselves mourning a loss of freedom and autonomy in her characters.

William Gass, setting out the opposition between the writer of fiction and a moral philosopher, claims that "the moral philosopher is expected to take a stand. He is expected to pronounce upon questions of value." The writer of fiction, on the other hand, is "subject only to those calculated disorders which are the result of his refusal, in the face of the actual complexities of any well-chosen 'case' to take a stand." ⁹² George Eliot, like other nineteenth century writers, for example Dickens or Thackeray, undoubtedly does take a stand and does not allow herself or her characters free rein. The "calculated disorders" are only minimally present. ⁱ They are generally kept outside the world of the novels at least as far as the main characters are concerned. And it becomes surprisingly difficult for the reader to dissociate himself from George Eliot's moral stand and gain his own perspective on the character's development. George Eliot's assessment and her expectation that we will share that assessment are all-pervasive. George Eliot has residual

ⁱ In The Novels of George Eliot, Barbara Hardy has pointed out, for example, the scene where Ladislav contemplates a possible adulterous relationship with Rosamond Vincy. But he is redeemed and spared such a future by Dorothea's love.

traces of Puritanism, and, as Ian Watt points out, in common with other writers with a similar bent, she treats life as if it were a "moral continuum."⁹³ There is no decision in her novels that is not dealt with in moral terms. This has certain consequences for the structure of the novels which I will now consider. Moral actions and decisions are placed along a finely calibrated axis. This creates a hierarchical arrangement of characters according to their degree of moral awareness. In addition, there are certain recurring types of behaviour or response which constitute moral categories in the novels and become, in the end, a system of encoded messages to help the reader determine and place each character accurately on this moral axis.

In an earlier chapter I set out George Eliot's belief in the possibility of moral development. I related this to the beliefs of her contemporaries, all of whom shared the same anxiety that moral growth should take place according to general laws of human development. I also discussed the concept of the moral sense and showed that it partook of the feelings and of the intellect. Sympathy is the affective component of the moral sense. A rational appreciation of oneself and one's position in the world, a recognition of what laws need to be submitted to and what laws are modifiable, however gradually, are the cognitive components. Characters can be placed along an axis according as they manifest more or fewer of these moral qualities. Thus, Dorothea, who scores highly and is very morally sensitive, still fails at first in her ability to accept another person's selfhood. It is not until she makes the most difficult moral step, the "suspension of disbelief in the selfhood of someone else,"⁹⁴ that she is able to respond compassionately to her husband. Similarly, Deronda, whose exquisite moral sensibility is shown in his treatment of other people, might appear initially to have very little progress to make, yet he lacks a committed duty. Once we have

identified the crucial aspects of George Eliot's concept of morality and acknowledged her belief in the possibility of moral development, we can assess the state and progress of any given character. She does not need to claim explicitly that a certain character, Mr Casaubon, for example, is deficient in the moral sense; she can indicate this by a reference to his small measure of sympathy, and we know instantly how to regard him. In this way, we register that his "was that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy." 95

The various signalling devices indicate to the reader the character's moral status and warn us whether he is capable of moral growth or is in moral decline. They provide us with an effective taxonomy of character. Duty, relationship to the past and a healthy, integrative memory, sympathy, attitudes towards immutable laws, all provide constitutive categories. Martin Price has pointed out that "manners ...for Jane Austen ... are the field in which the moral self is revealed and defined." 96

George Eliot has several such fields. Thus the contrasting attitudes Gwendolen holds towards the family home at Offendene reveal that she has grown morally and integrated herself to the past. I have already quoted the authorial regret, at the beginning of the novel, that she is not so established, but after she has been scathed by her marriage to Grandcourt, she thinks wistfully of Offendene as a welcome haven and no longer as a place of imprisoning dullness.

She saw the grey-shoulders of the downs, the cattle-specked fields, the shadowy plantations with rutted lanes where the barked timber lay for a wayside seat, the neatly-clipped hedges on the road from the parsonage to Offendene, the avenue where she was gradually discerned from the windows, the hall-door opening, and her mother or one of the troublesome sisters coming to meet her. All that brief experience of a quiet home which had once seemed a dullness to be fled from, now came back to her as a restful escape, a station where she found the breath of morning and the unrepublishing voice of birds.... 97

Gwendolen's rejection of the stability of her family life and her consequent rejection of the claims of duty contrast strongly with Deronda's love of his family home and his search for relationship, identity, and duty. (When the book is laid out schematically like this, we can see why George Eliot was angered at suggestions that it might profitably be divided.) Similarly, Maggie Tulliver's sensitive response to other people is presented as a foil to Tom's rigidity, although they both have a love of the past, a recognition of its value, and a strong sense of duty. It is just that Tom's morality partakes of the inflexibility and narrowness of his nature. He lacks the compassionate tolerance of his sister.

The morally degenerate characters likewise have their taxonomy. They lack the qualities that make up the constitutive categories. Alcharisi suffers from remorse but still claims confirmation that she was in the right to make a life for herself without considering her father's wishes for her. Tito Melema's "first distinct colloquy"⁹⁸ points constantly to his moral insufficiency when he decides, on purely hedonistic and egoistic principles, to continue his comfortable existence in Florence and not seek out his adoptive father. Some characters are inevitably more highlighted than others. Alcharisi's role is purely functional: to conceal from and eventually to reveal to Deronda, the facts of his birth. What she is and how she becomes what she is, are of no importance to the development of the plot so that she can be characterised and taxonomically placed quite briefly by her insistence on her own rights. Tito Melema, on the other hand, is important in himself, not just functionally. Accordingly, we have the laying out of the stages of his moral decline by means of a technique George Eliot adapted from the assumptions of the theory of psychological determinism.

The categories are not necessarily discrete. This is especially

apparent when we look at the characters at the far end of the moral axis, the egoists. They tend to fall short on all the moral counts, disclaiming all duty, lacking in sympathy, believing in chance and the efficacies of gambling, and totally misconstruing each other's motives. The "speck of self" ⁹⁹ George Eliot mentions in Middlemarch effectively blots out the rest of the world and they respond only in accordance with their own claims. Rosamond Vincy's neutrally expressed question to Lydgate after he has attempted to win her co-operation in their money troubles, is symptomatic of such egoists. "'What can I do, Tertius?'" ¹⁰⁰ she asks. Her self-protecting mask is shattered only once by the angry disdain of Will Ladislav, and this makes it easier for her to respond to Dorothea's goodness. But otherwise she remains the same: exquisite, shallow and egoistic. Other egoists are redeemed in George Eliot's eyes by remorse. Arthur Donnithorne does his penance outside the covers of the book, Adam Bede, but Gwendolen Harleth who has much in common with Rosamond suffers before our eyes and, like Esther Lyon, is only redeemed by the impact of a larger character on her narrow selfishness.

The signalling devices nudge the reader in the right direction, refine his moral awareness, and prevent him from giving his sympathy or attention to the wrong character. In an earlier novel, The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot emphasises Tom Tulliver's rigidity at the expense of his morally laudable qualities: his acceptance of duty and his strong relationship with his past. Accordingly, few readers grant him the sympathy they give to Maggie. Both Tom and Maggie, however, were meant to illustrate the problem one generation has with another. The messages with regard to Tom were not clearly enough expressed. George Eliot regretted the withdrawal of the reader's sympathy from Tom; she would have been outraged that any reader could feel sympathy with Grandcourt, whose behaviour towards Gwendolen has been seen as entirely appropriate

for upper middle class society where there is a skittish wife to be brought under control. George Eliot's insistence that Grandcourt is evil has been deplored. This shows us that we need to be on our guard in case George Eliot's directions to the reader by way of these encoded messages prevent us from exercising our own judgement in the case. With such morally reprehensible characters as Tito Melema and Henleigh Grandcourt, we need to be alert for George Eliot's cues and reserve our own judgement. I have already indicated with regard to Romola how we are led to accept that the heroine is in the right in her assessment of her husband's character because we have been previously informed of his baseness to his father, which she is ignorant of. She justifiably feels betrayed at Tito's sale of her father's library and in her anger, she turns on him and accuses him of betraying someone else. She does this on the flimsiest of evidence. She has felt that he is concealing from her his true motives in wearing the defensive armour and she has seen Piero di Cosimo's painting of a Tito blanched with fear and clutched by an escaping prisoner, whose connection with her husband she has no way of knowing. We accept that she should thus accuse him on such scant evidence because we already know of his relationship to Baldassarre. We forget to allow for the fact that we are seeing him through Romola's unflinching gaze. The rigidity of her moral integrity is partly what destroys him. He is understandably repelled by the harshness of her judgement and their relationship is permanently damaged. If George Eliot had intended him to be redeemed by Romola's larger nature, he would have been brought to confess openly his misdemeanours.

In the same way we see Grandcourt often through Gwendolen's eyes and accept, as a result, that he is as cruel as she makes him out to be. Because she is scared of him, we accuse him of sadism. We do, however, know that he likes to exert power (as we see very graphically in the scene

with his dogs ¹⁰¹), and we are told that he would make an excellent governor of a colony, ¹⁰² and that he expects to assert his own will in his marriage. He has also had a passionate affair with another man's wife, which has produced several children, and although his feeling towards her has died down he still maintains contact with her and supports her financially. He is bored and obnoxious, but because Gwendolen hates him this does not make him evil. Gwendolen has not fulfilled her side of the marriage contract. She has married him without love, which he knows full well, and has no understanding of the duties she has undertaken as a wife. What makes us accept Gwendolen's conception of him is the general disapproval meted out to him by means of the encoded messages. He is not left to stand on his own merits or demerits and we are not allowed a free assessment of him. It is not that George Eliot appeals to our better judgement in order that we may judge him more kindly than we feel disposed to do. And Gwendolen's growth does not require her to see her husband compassionately as Dorothea's does. This is one of the reasons why Mr Casaubon is treated so generously and the pathos of his situation is brought to our attention. George Eliot pontificates against Grandcourt and leaves us with a picture of unmitigated evil. Gwendolen fears Grandcourt, but even more, she fears her own violent instincts which are strongly aroused now that, after a lifetime of petty tyranny over her mother and sisters, she is trapped by a stronger will than her own. This does not automatically make Grandcourt vicious. Intransigence often calls forth murderous rage. Lydgate could easily have taken Rosamond's white throat and throttled her and Gwendolen has to throw away the key of the box which contains the stiletto knife. But the murderous rage belongs to the person who feels it. The one who has inspired it may be innocuous. In the case of Tito and Grandcourt, I feel that we are asked to accept rather too much on hearsay. The master illusionist is dis-

tracting us while the real events are enacted elsewhere.

What this means in terms of the novels is that, as Quentin Anderson says, no George Eliot character is "enfranchised" in the way that don Quixote or Julian Sorel is. "The very fineness and clarity of George Eliot's vision, extending to the edge of her canvas," he claims, "quite preclude her granting to her characters the favour of existence."¹⁰³ Fineness and clarity still exercise control, no matter how admirable they may be in their own right. This is a different problem in a novel to that of point of view and the post-Jamesian rejection of the involved author. George Eliot is an omniscient author modifying and guiding the response of her readers, sometimes directly by means of explicit appeals to them and sometimes less directly by a sort of emotional blackmail. For example, when she has shown us Tom Tulliver's intransigence towards Maggie, she steps in to prevent our adopting too "severe" a judgement of his character. "Tom, like every one of us," she informs us, "was imprisoned within the limits of his own nature....If you are inclined to be severe on his severity, remember that the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision."¹⁰⁴ This leaves us little alternative; to persist in severity is to declare ourselves of lesser vision and so George Eliot directs our judgements by exhortation and subtle suasion.

Such control has been described as the "authoritarian monism" of the fully omniscient mode of narration" and has been contrasted with the "multifarious relativism"¹⁰⁵ of twentieth century modes. It is inevitably hard for the novel, "the distinct art form of liberalism,"¹⁰⁶ with its "acknowledgement of the plenitude, diversity and individuality of human beings"¹⁰⁷ to absorb such "authoritarian monism." We may be prepared to accept the authorial directives towards our increased moral awareness when they issue from a mind of the quality of George Eliot's.

But we may also feel that the subtly encoded messages impose too rigid a structure and prevent the characters from manifesting their "plenitude, diversity and individuality." W. J. Harvey claims that the novelist, "as he surveys the crowded human scene" must "be able to withhold final judgement, to suspend his attachment to a particular point of view, to reconcile disparities, to encompass the multitudinous and conflicting interests, values and assumptions of the world if he is to allow this full weight within the world of his novel." ¹⁰⁸

I am maintaining that George Eliot does not always achieve this suspension of final judgement. This is not to decry the breadth and compassion of her insight, the ecological complexity of her presentation of the inter-relationship between an individual and his society, nor the trenchant irony with which she treats her morally deluded characters. But at either end of her moral scale there is a rigidity of presentation. And especially with the more morally evolved characters, the moral absolutes take over and we feel that they are being held in too constraining a grasp.

But, as I have indicated, it is not every George Eliot character who is locked in this rigid set of co-ordinates. There are many characters in the middle range of her moral scale who are struggling against their own impulses, forced to endure the consequences of giving in or failing to exert the necessary strength of will. And for them, George Eliot herself acknowledges, a different psychological approach is needed. She answered Blackwood's demur about Maggie Tulliver by declaring that "if the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble but liable to great error--error that is anguish to its own nobleness--then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology." ¹⁰⁹

The presentation of such characters as Maggie and Lydgate whose errors

are "anguish to [their] own nobleness" belongs to such a widening psychology. They are surrounded with a "penumbra of unrealised possibilities." ¹¹⁰ And this is not just that they are presented ecologically with their relationships to, and their independence on their respective communities drawn so convincingly. It is more that we sense that it is touch and go whether they will betray their own ideals; a little more exertion here and a little less pressure there, and things might have been different. Maggie might have found the courage to stand up to her redoubtable brother; Lydgate might have succeeded in presenting their financial situation to Rosamond in terms that she could or would have understood. These characters are allowed to be more convincingly and roundly human. Gwendolen Harleth is another such, except that with her we are in doubt as to the permanence of her moral redemption once Deronda's constraining presence is withdrawn. There is an unpredictability about these characters. The encoded messages still place them but the presentation of their moral struggles is more flexible and we sense that they confront a wider range of possibilities. The morally very good and very bad of George Eliot's characters are "resultants," in Lewes' terminology; these middle range characters are "emergents" ¹¹¹ and, as a result, they themselves take on a greater humanity and a greater vividness. There is greater room in their portrayal for George Eliot's binocular vision. In an earlier chapter I have already indicated the withdrawal of irony from the morally evolved characters. But with characters like Maggie or Gwendolen, or Lydgate, George Eliot can regard their foibles and their moral struggles with irony at the same time as she is surrounding them with her compassion.

The satisfaction we feel at her presentation of her erring characters and the dissatisfaction aroused by her very good or very bad characters fit an Aristotelian definition of character and its re-

relationship to tragedy. We are examining those characters who can be said to suffer from hamartia. They show a fatal flaw and we can concede that their stories are tragic. There is a sense of waste surrounding Lydgate's realisation that he will not be able, after all, to contribute significantly to medical progress. There is great pathos in Maggie's desperate struggle with the more passionate side of her nature and in her final comprehension of the true meaning of renunciation. George Eliot tells us that "it is [the] very perception that the thing we renounce is precious, is something never to be compensated to us, which constitutes the beauty and heroism of renunciation."¹¹² There is great tenderness in the final portrait of Gwendolen's suffering, in her attempts to discard her egoistic clinging to Deronda and rejoice at his happiness. It is these situations that survive a reading of the novels, not whether Tito and Grandcourt get the deaths they deserve.

George Eliot's own expressed goal in writing her novels was to win our sympathy for "struggling, erring human creatures."¹¹³ Inevitably our sympathies are more engaged with characters who are "wrestling,"¹¹⁴ like Maggie Tulliver, with themselves and unyielding environments, than when we are confronted with the downfall of the unjust or the elevation of the just. And so we appreciate George Eliot's powers more fully when she ceases to direct us so forcibly.

I have concentrated on the implications of George Eliot's moral and psychological position in order to show that it constitutes a rigid set of co-ordinates and provides a more or less distorting model for her more extreme characters. The edges of this moral frame are the problem. Against its lower boundaries, lesser characters, Tito Melema and Grandcourt, for example, are bruised. They are made to endure a form of poetic justice sadly out of keeping for a realistic novel.¹¹⁵ Against its upper frame there is a limitation of possibilities. Characters like

Romola, Dorothea Brooke and Deronda, while they appear to have greater freedom to act than their fellows, are actually tightly constrained by their creator. In her rule-governed universe there is no room for the random nor the truly original. But in the welter of existence that faces the morally struggling and suffering characters, there is more space. Her presentation of the decline or rise of such a character is more three-dimensional. There are inevitably more possibilities for progress and regression, and greater opportunities for the exercise of irony.

If we accept the terms of reference offered us in the novels, and adopt their set of criteria for evaluating the behaviour of the different characters, we may not find the loss of freedom too damaging. If, on the other hand, we step outside George Eliot's moral frame, recognise the persuasive force of her encoded messages, and attempt to judge her characters apart from her own clearly expressed intentions, we find ourselves regretting that she held both her characters and the reader in such a constraining hand.

Conclusion.

George Eliot's novels hover precariously on the edge of a mechanistic universe where every cause is scrupulously laid out and irreversible. At the same time, her belief in the possibility of moral development, whether of the individual or of the race, requires her to allow some measure of freedom, some room to manoeuvre within this harsh, uncompromising universe. To soften the impact of an inexorably impersonal world, she stresses the importance of fellowship and sympathy. Characters are defined in terms of relationship, not of identity. Submission and resignation are enjoined; individualism is suspect and becomes implicitly identified with egoism and selfishness. The moral absolutism of George Eliot's thought does not permit her to enfranchise either her characters or her readers.

We have completed our examination of George Eliot's system of beliefs and outlined the moral and psychological preoccupations she shared with her contemporaries. We have seen how she reached a compromise between "necessitarianism" and the ability "to will strongly."¹ We have traced her acceptance of the various psychological assumptions that prevailed in the mid-nineteenth century. And most significantly, we have defined her value system and her belief in moral progress. These are fundamental ideas that recur not only in her letters and articles but also in the authorial commentary of her novels and their scientific and literary allusions. And, as we have seen, they also greatly determine the ways in which she presents her characters to us and their various responses to the moral dilemmas confronting them.

In this analysis of her work I have adopted a two-fold stance. I have identified and isolated her key ideas and concepts, relating them con-

stantly to the novels and to the shared mid-century moral and psychological discourse. But I have also endeavoured to provide a means of evaluating these ideas in terms of the actual demands of writing a novel: the presentation of character growth and change, the development of plot, the interweaving of themes, and the use of aesthetic distance in the varying perspectives offered by a compassionate and an ironic narrator. In this way, I have brought out both the strengths and weaknesses of George Eliot's system of beliefs when it is applied to the novels. In so far as it requires her to shift her perspective backwards and forwards between the inexorable laws, (the "hard unaccommodating Actual," ²) and the individual, struggling human being, it greatly enriches her novels. But in other ways it militates against their free development. Her belief in "universal causality," ³ in the effect of habit as a strong determinant of character, and in the transmission of inherited tendencies leads her to impose restraints on the development of her characters. Her moral stand also provides too rigid a set of co-ordinates within which the characters establish themselves. Flawed characters like Gwendolen Harleth and Lydgate have space within this system, but the degenerate characters die too conveniently, and the morally elevated characters appear to be granted more freedom than is indeed the case. Their development is carefully marked out within George Eliot's moral absolutism and her hierarchical value system. Characters and readers are too rigidly controlled within a world which, no matter how internally coherent, still offers a very limited range of choices. George Eliot's system of beliefs limits the development of her characters and provides too inflexible a set of parameters.

Notes.

All quotations from George Eliot are from the 10 volume Library Edition of The Works of George Eliot, (Edinburgh, 1901).

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